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from Carcanet

Family Ties
The Hour of the Star
The Foreign Legion
Near to the Wild Heart

Discovering the World

CLARICE LISPECTOR

Discovering the World

CARCANET

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Giovanni Pontiero
Manchester, July 1991

Preface

CLARICE LISPECTOR is widely recognized as the most original and innovative Brazilian woman writer of this century. In 1984, seven years after she died of cancer, Lispector's son edited the so-called *Crônicas* or chronicles which she published in the Saturday edition of the *Jornal do Brasil* [The Brazilian News] from August 1967 until December 1973. The book is a miscellaneous collection of aphorisms, diary entries, reminiscences, travel notes, interviews, serialized stories, essays, loosely defined as 'chronicles': a genre peculiar to Brazil which allows poets and writers to address a wider readership on a vast range of topics and themes. The general tone is one of greater freedom and intimacy than one finds in comparable articles or weekly columns in the European press. Arranged in chronological order, the contents of *A Descoberta do Mundo* [Discovering the World] include a number of narratives and items Lispector had already published elsewhere, notably in *A Legião Estrangeira* [The Foreign Legion], which was first published in 1964. In *Discovering the World*, these reappear with new titles and minor revisions. The anthology also omits certain items published in the *Jornal do Brasil* because they were deemed to be *circumstantial*.

Lispector confessed she did not find it easy to adapt to the genre. She inquired: Is the chronicle a story? a conversation? the revelation of one's inner thoughts? She questioned the wisdom of tackling a genre which to some extent was alien to her introspective nature. Summing up her disquiet, she commented: 'I am apprehensive. Writing too much and too often can contaminate the word' or as Fernando Pessoa, a Portuguese poet whom she admired, once said: 'Speaking is the easiest way of becoming unknown'. She was afraid of becoming too personal, and the need to be topical and conform to the conditions and constraints of a weekly column worried her. As she acquired more confidence, she freely adapted the genre to suit her own purpose.

Varied and unpredictable, the chronicles allow us to piece together the life and career of this singular personality. The chronicles register contrasting moods, one moment whimsical,

the next grave and questioning, but whatever the theme, disarmingly frank.

The autobiographical details in some of the chronicles offer a reliable account of her origins and background, and help to clarify a number of misconceptions. Her parents emigrated from the Ukraine to Alagoas in north-eastern Brazil when she was barely two months old. They subsequently moved on to Recife in Pernambuco, where her father found employment in agriculture, then commerce. The family had little money and her mother was in poor health. The youngest of three sisters, Lispector had a happy childhood, notwithstanding the difficulties her parents experienced in adjusting to their new environment. Precocious and imaginative, she soon discovered the world of books and by the age of seven she was already writing stories. She recalled: 'I thought a book was like a tree, an animal, something that grows. I had no idea there was an author standing in the wings.' She submitted her stories to the local *Diário de Pernambuco* [The Pernambucan Daily News] which ran a children's page, but they were rejected. For, even as a child, Lispector was much less interested in plot than in sensation, perception or intuition.

When she was twelve, the family moved to Rio which was then the capital. The year was 1937 and it coincided with the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas and the formation of Brazil's New State. On completing her schooling, Lispector decided to study law. While still at university she also began writing for *A Noite* [The Evening News]. This introduced her to the world of journalism and she covered a wide range of features with the exception of crime reports and the social column. Meanwhile, her interest in law began to wane but she persevered and completed the course. She soon abandoned any idea of practising law, however, and as she was to observe wryly: 'My law studies taught me nothing, not even how to protect the copyright of my own books.' In 1943 she married a fellow-student, Maury Gurgel Valente, who was soon to enter the diplomatic service, and in the following year she published her first novel *Perto do Coração selvagem* [Near to the Wild Heart]. Lispector was seventeen and unknown, but the unusual form and extraordinary language of this brutally honest account of marriage and betrayal attracted the attention of several important literary critics. Sérgio Milliet and Antônio Cândido recognized at once that a promising new writer had made her début. Their reviews spoke of a 'sudden

break' with established criteria and of a radically different concept of fiction, which opened up new possibilities. Her début was timely.

Marriage to a diplomat meant foreign postings: Naples, Berne, Torquay, and Washington; the birth of two sons, Pedro (in Berne in 1949) and Paulo (in Washington in 1953), meant additional responsibilities. For some sixteen years Lispector was to be separated from her beloved Brazil, apart from brief return visits which only intensified her sense of exile and homesickness. She detested the social obligations required of a diplomat's wife. Writing became increasingly important for her spiritual survival. She longed for greater privacy in order to be able to meditate and write her books. Writing became synonymous with solitude and a more profound form of existence, and only her work and children kept her sane during those years in alien surroundings. In 1959, she finally separated from her husband and returned to Rio with her children. She was now free to concentrate on her chosen career. Her output was steady, and by the time she died of cancer in the winter of 1977, she had produced nine novels, eight collections of short stories, four tales for children and a Portuguese translation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Despite her Ukrainian ancestry, Lispector identified completely with Brazil and most of all with north-eastern Brazil. Memories of her childhood, especially in Recife, evoked the authentic Brazil where traditions and folklore had been preserved. A slight speech defect made her sound like a foreigner, but she was adamant that she had forged her soul and innermost thoughts with the Portuguese language, 'a difficult language', which she was to transform and even re-invent by means of conceptual refinements, subtle nuances and bold experiments with syntax.

Brazil's other great writer of this century, João Guimarães Rosa, once told her: 'Clarice, I don't read you just for the literature, but in order to learn about life.' Most readers would agree. Her dramatic insights can surprise and shock, amuse and distress. Such is the intensity and vehemence of her prose that it unleashes everything which is gentle and violent in this world of ours. And as she herself confided: 'Everything affects me... I see too much, hear too much, everything demands too much of me.'

The intimate revelations of *Discovering the World* take us through the various stages of womanhood from innocence to

awakening perceptions of good and evil. The transition from adolescence to maturity is one of solemn rites, at once delicate and vulnerable. The lurking fear of 'ambush', both physical and emotional, is central to many of the narratives. Lispector walked the perilous path of life in fear and trepidation, yet she was curious and determined to unravel the mystery of existence. She dubbed herself 'an audacious coward' *(uma ousada encabulada)* and confronted life on those terms.

In all her work there is relentless self-questioning. Aware that she was speaking on behalf of all mankind, she was wont to say: 'I am so mysterious that I do not understand myself.' She saw the human condition as flawed, fragmentary and incomplete; the darker side of our nature as being compounded of fear, revulsion, cruelty and hatred. But once having recognized the inherent contradictions, she set about trying to reconcile freedom with restraint, humility with pride, solitude with the need to communicate. Strength had to be drawn from weakness, human reversals transformed into salvation.

The sense of wounded innocence and cruel deception is a constant theme in Lispector's stories and chronicles. She is nevertheless convinced that 'generosity (akin to love) is the very core of our humanity' and that 'wrath and hatred are the sorrow of not being able to love'. For her, 'a world without love is lost', and like most of her women characters she confessed to 'an enormous capacity for love'. Strong convictions, alas, are no guarantee of painless achievement. She understood that love could elevate the spirit but that it could also be deceptive. 'Love,' she wrote, 'can never be a bad thing. But it often turns out to be hatred in disguise.' Love, whatever its nature, exacted some measure of self-abnegation. She confided: 'I often tire of people. Then it passes and I once more become curious and attentive.' For Lispector, it was most essential that love should never become obtrusive. In one of her chronicles she describes the perfect companion: 'Someone who will not stare too much and cause embarrassment. Someone who will know when to speak and when to be silent, someone who will adore me with discretion and accept both my virtues and faults.'

This might explain why she enjoyed most of all the company of children and her pet animals. Her conversations with young children provide some of the most remarkable items in *Discovering the World*. Lispector excels in expressing a child's sense of things. Her maternal instincts were strong and she never

tired of observing, guiding, questioning her own sons, but, above all, of listening to them and analysing their responses to the world around them. She insisted: 'One must be gentle, very gentle when dealing with children.' She associated children with spontaneity and a disarming candour.

The constant presence of some pet animal gave her the same sense of compatibility and mutual understanding. As a child, she was nicknamed 'The Protector of Animals' and she brought up her own children to love and care for domestic pets. All four of the tales she wrote for young readers deal with animals. The various species in her narratives and chronicles arouse a wide range of emotions: compassion, fear, amusement and horror, but in general terms she firmly believed that the beasts of the earth adapt more readily to 'the grace of existence'. She explained: 'An animal never substitutes one thing for another, never sublimates things as we humans are obliged to sublimate them.' Pets offered the loyalty and integrity she often found lacking in human beings. She defined the constant presence of an animal in one's life as 'a vital experience' and argued that 'people who cannot abide animals are afraid of themselves'.

'Fear of self' intrigued Lispector as she struggled to unravel the mysteries of life and death and the ultimate meaning of existence. The nature of God, matter, spirit and human misery is explored time and time again throughout her work. She asks: 'What is anguish?' then gives her own answer. 'This search of mine for meaning is in itself a kind of anguish. This is something which starts with life, for when they cut the umbilical cord there is pain and separation'. Like the man who came close to suicide in one of her chronicles, we can only survive by finding a register midway between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo*. The temptation to abdicate was often overwhelming. But in the end, Lispector saw life as a mandate. Death held no fears for her, only its prelude.

Guided by inner rather than external voices, solitude and silence were an essential part of her spiritual armour. She agreed with Thomas Merton that '*true solitude* separates a human being from others so that he or she might develop all that is good in their heart and soul'. She astutely observed that 'the solitude of others saves us from solitude, just as self-imposed solitude can save us from being submerged by the excessive love of others'. An habitual insomniac, she learned how to value silence and converse with the night. In her own words: 'There is a great silence inside me. And this silence has been the fount of my

words. And from this same silence has come the most precious thing of all, namely, silence itself.'

Solitude and silence were conducive to 'a state of grace' (another of her favourite phrases), which she was careful to differentiate from inspiration or that spiritual state often attributed to saints. The 'state of grace' to which she referred was that enjoyed by ordinary people who suddenly become *totally real*, because they are ordinary, human and recognizable..., 'an experience capable of redeeming the human condition even while emphasising its cruel limitations.' The spiritual world Lispector inhabited, like her fictional world, was woven from fragments of experience and intuition. Her search for a faceless god was also a search for 'lost essence', a search for unassailable integrity and wholeness. And for Lispector, the deist, God remained the most reassuring of all doubts. Obsessed by scruple, she was aware that too much probing could be self-defeating, that the pursuit of absolute goals (perfection, beauty, truth) could be destructive.

Fleeting references throughout *Discovering the World* identify the writers at home and abroad who made most impact (she preferred the word *impact* to *influence*) on her. Critics have suggested links with Kafka, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Camus and Faulkner. She herself singled out the name of Hermann Hesse, whose seminal *Steppenwolf* (1927) left her spellbound. She describes the book in one of her chronicles as a genuine landmark. Lispector clearly interpreted this book as Hesse himself intended: as 'a tale of griefs and needs; still not the book of a man despairing, but of a man believing.'

Her links with the philosophers and writers of the so-called Existentialist Movement have been exhaustively researched. Echoes of Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre can be found in many of her narratives and essays. She shared their anguished awareness of nothingness and encroaching absurdity which renders life intolerable and meaningless. She experienced the same frustration and nausea in the face of life's contradictions and the uncertain nature of human freedom. Endless confrontations with her own weakness before the enormity of life led her to conclude: 'We can use our defects as crutches just as easily as our qualities' and from continuous errors she found new paths.

It was perhaps inevitable that Lispector should be compared with Virginia Woolf. Both women were concerned with the inner

life of feelings and thoughts and they forged a language of their own to describe the fragility of existence and its dark, enigmatic forces. Emotionally they were both prone to alternating moods of elation and depression, of expansiveness and withdrawal. In both writers there are the same intensive perceptions of sound, sight, touch, the same irresistible urge 'to brush, scrape and kindle...' And most important of all, they shared a belief that plots do not matter, what goes on inside the characters' minds does. Lispector dismissed any direct influence. She only read Virginia Woolf's novels some years after the publication of her own first novel *Near to the Wild Heart*. And as she confides in one of her chronicles, the English writer's suicide left her deeply disturbed. She could understand the temptation to abdicate but firmly believed that life had to be confronted. 'One's awesome duty,' she wrote, 'is to carry on to the bitter end. And to count on no one. To live one's own reality. To discover the truth.'

Other aspects of Lispector's writing suggest that there is even closer affinity with Katherine Mansfield. While still in her teens, Lispector leafed through one of Mansfield's books. She does not specify the title or state whether the book was in the original English or in a Portuguese translation. It left a deep impression: 'There were phrases in that book such as I had never read before ...phrases so different from anything I had ever encountered that I carried on reading...totally absorbed. Deeply moved by what I had read, I thought to myself: this book *is me*.' She bought it without a moment's hesitation and only later discovered that Mansfield was already an author of some standing.

Lispector's prose, like that of the New Zealand writer, appears to flow easily and naturally, governed by feeling and observation rather than by any apparent calculation of its effect. Both built their narratives on fragments of memory and experience with single-minded intensity. Both writers excelled in shorter narrative forms, their eye focused on the moment, the instantaneous, fleeting impressions amidst cross-currents of fear and hope. Lispector, like Mansfield, can address herself intimately to the reader – or to no one – simply to the blank page. In both, there is the terrible gift of nearness, the same alarming penetration. In both writers, we find the same interest in the ambivalences of family life, the same suggestion of division and discontinuity between male and female experiences. In both we find the scars of suffering and betrayal and a residue of bitterness. Both imposed their own shape on the seemingly intractable realities

of life in the shared belief that art is not an attempt on the part of the artist to reconcile existence with his or her vision: it is an attempt to create his or her world *within* this world.

However valid these comparisons, Lispector's cultural roots and social environment could not have been more different. Her experience of life and people was broader and more varied, her attitudes less narrow and élitist. And as a writer she was more isolated than either Virginia Woolf or Katherine Mansfield. There was no Leonard Woolf or Middleton Murry on hand to encourage her literary endeavours. There was nothing comparable to the Bloomsbury Group in Rio. There were no influential friends or publishing contacts to promote her career.

Lispector's development as a writer was a much more solitary affair. She tended to avoid artistic and literary circles and jealously guarded her privacy. This isolation was no great sacrifice. Her statements about her own approach to writing confirm the difficulty she experienced in discussing her work with critics or other writers. Her entire approach was intuitive rather than intellectual. What critics referred to as her 'rare intelligence', she preferred to define as 'knowing sensibility'. Unconventional and idiosyncratic in her methods, she found it difficult to draft a manuscript, to 'narrate ideas' and to 'embellish them with words'. Her narratives grew from some sensation, some nebulous image, or word or phrase she had heard. She was less interested in events than in their repercussions and she allowed these to flower or surface as if by an act of nature. Posing the question: 'What is fiction?', she replied: 'The creation of characters and events which might not exist but which could so easily exist that they somehow come to life.' Any suggestion, however, that her narratives should observe some predetermined form only met with one reaction: '*Je m'en fiche.*' Time and time again she would insist: 'Phrases are not manufactured: they are born.' Intent upon communicating with as much immediacy as possible and without the intrusion of words, she spoke of a 'tacit understanding' between herself and the reader as if conveying thoughts and feelings by means of 'a gesture, a brush-stroke, or melody without words'. Critics have spoken of the '*effervescence* or *efflorescence* of things imagined' in an attempt to define this unmistakable quality in her writing which evokes rather than describes, encircles rather than strikes her target. She preferred suggestive ambiguities to clear-cut definitions.

Hence her unique achievement was to deepen and renew the

Portuguese language. An inventive use of vocabulary and syntax produces mysterious nuances and a pattern of crescendo and diminuendo more readily associated with musical composition. Tense, dramatic, vertiginous phrasing can suddenly give way to terrifying silence. In constant pursuit of the ineffable, she found a solution in the breakdown of language. She claimed: 'Only when the construction is missing can I obtain what language has failed to achieve.' Like the Existentialists, she recognized the close links between existence and language, between *being* and *saying*. Hence the obsessive probing in one of her most hermetic narratives, 'The Egg and the Chicken', where she patiently struggles to square the *name* within the *thing*. The enemy of creative lies, she was anxious to enlighten rather than to mystify her readers. Like Mansfield, she was labelled both witch and mystic, but neither of these descriptions does her justice. If she could be stark and pessimistic, she could also be droll and witty. Her sharp eye misses nothing of the human foibles and absurdities around her. The chronicles include amusing encounters with society women, loquacious taxi-drivers, the business-like madame of a brothel, beggars with their own code of honour, unpredictable housemaids who can be formidable and wreak havoc, and an envious nanny whose social ambitions outstrip those of her mistress.

The chronicles also confirm that Lispector was by no means indifferent to political and social problems. The one-sided image of the tragic muse has misled some critics and readers. The image is not merely false but a travesty of her true nature. Lispector was an astute observer of human concerns. The economic plight and social divisions in her native Brazil were never far from her thoughts. As a child, she had seen the most degrading poverty in the North-eastern provinces, causing her 'to tremble with impotent rage'; in Rio, the starving poor pricked her conscience, and the future of the Brazilian Indians concerned her as deeply as the exploitation of the indigenous population in Portugal's African colonies. She wrote: 'Frankly, I feel socially committed. Everything I write is tied, at least in my mind, to the real world in which we live. Perhaps this aspect of my writing will become stronger one day.' She wrote those words in December 1967, and this social concern had indeed become stronger by the time she came to write her last novel *A Hora da Estrela* [The Hour of the Star] some ten years later. The plight of her heroine, the ugly, illiterate, impoverished Macabea, who has made her way

from Alagoas to the slums of Rio, sums up the Brazilian social drama: the same drama which perplexed and disturbed Lispector as a child in Recife and later influenced her decision to study law in the hope that she might help to reform the country's penal system. When pressed to comment on the question of literature and commitment, she replied: 'It would indeed be strange if I were to remain indifferent to life in my own country. I may not write about social problems but I live them intensely.' Even in her stories for children there is a gentle plea for racial tolerance and social equality. And her mistrust of politicians and their abuse of power is quite unambiguous in two chronicles: 'The Leader's Dream' and 'In Memory of the Man who Stood Down'.

Her political voice may have been understated, her note of censure discreet, but her solidarity on behalf of justice and human dignity was beyond question. She needed no convincing that charity is a futile substitute for social justice and firmly believed that hunger spiritualizes no one. Her sentiments echoed those of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Brazil's most politically-committed poet this century, when he declared:

> Time is my concern, time now,
> men now, life now.

First and foremost, however, was her commitment to writing. In a television interview in February 1977, she confessed: 'When I am not writing, I am dead.' She believed that writing could turn a human being into a divinity. And when the words flowed in harmony with thought and feeling, she experienced something akin to ecstasy. She staunchly defended her individual freedom as a writer and insisted: 'If there exists such a thing as *expression*, then let it emanate from what I am.' Appropriately enough, the last item in this collection leaves us with the question which was to haunt her all her life: 'Could it be that the person who sees most, feels and suffers most?' That was the price she paid for the rare insights she so memorably expressed.

Giovanni Pontiero
Manchester, May 1991

1967

TIRESOME CHILDREN

I cannot. I cannot bear to think of the scene I visualised and which is real. It is night and, unable to sleep because of the pain, a child calls out: Mummy, I'm hungry. She tries to comfort him: Go to sleep. He protests: But I'm hungry. She insists: Go to sleep. He says: I can't sleep, I'm too hungry. In exasperation, she tells him again: Go to sleep. He insists. She shouts at him in despair: Go to sleep and stop bothering me! Without stirring, they lie there in the dark without speaking. Has he fallen asleep? – she wonders, wide awake. But he is much too frightened to complain. They are both wide awake in the blackness of night. Until overcome by suffering and weariness, they both doze off in their shell of resignation. I cannot bear resignation. Ah, how I swallow my disgust with greed and pleasure.

SURPRISE

To gaze into the mirror and say to oneself in amazement: How mysterious I look. So delicate and yet so strong. And how the curve of my lips has maintained its innocence.

Every man and woman has chanced at some time or other to gaze into the mirror and take themselves by surprise. For a fraction of a second you see yourself as something to be looked at. This could be called narcissism, but I would prefer to call it: the bliss of existence. The happiness of capturing in one's external appearance the echoes of one's inner self: Oh, so it is true that I did not imagine myself and that I really do exist.

PLAYING AT THINKING

The art of thinking without taking any risks. Thinking might well be classified as one of the ways of enjoying oneself, were it not for the fact that thought pursues the paths of emotion. Friends are not invited to play this game because of the hazards of thinking. Much better just to invite them to pay a visit, and casually think together under the guise of words.

So long as the game is kept simple. Because to think deeply – which means taking the game seriously – one needs to be alone. To engage in thinking is a deeply emotional experience, and we only have the courage to think in front of *somebody else*, when there is sufficient trust to be able to use the words *somebody else*, without feeling inhibited. Besides it is asking a great deal of those helping us to think: they must be kind-hearted, loving and affectionate, and also know what it means to engage in thinking. As much is asked of anyone listening to words and silences as of someone being asked to feel. No, no that is not true. Feeling makes greater demands.

When it comes to thinking as a pastime, the absence of any risks means anyone can play this game. Naturally, there is an element of risk. One can play and come away with a heavy heart. But on the whole, once certain intuitive measures have been taken, there is no danger.

As a pastime, thinking has the enormous advantage of being portable. Although in my opinion it is best kept in mid-air. At certain hours in the afternoon, for example, when the house is full of light yet seems to be drained of light, while the whole city trembles as it works and we alone are working at home unbeknown to anyone – at those hours when dignity might be restored were we to have a repair shop or a sewing room – at such hours one thinks. Like this: you begin from wherever you might be, even if it is not in the afternoon; only at night would I consider it inadvisable.

In the days when we used to send our clothes to be washed – I was once preparing the laundry list. Perhaps out of habit or because I felt a sudden urge to keep a tidy notebook as at school, I began to write: List of... And at that very moment I felt a sudden urge to stop being serious. This is the first sign of *animus brincandi*, when one is engaged in thinking – as – a pastime. So, quick as a flash I wrote down: List of emotions. What I was trying to say with these words I was only to discover later – for another sign of being on the right track is not to worry about not understanding; the attitude to take is: that one loses nothing by waiting, one loses nothing by not understanding.

Then I began to draw up a short list of emotions which I am unable to name. If I receive a present given with affection from someone whom I dislike – how am I to describe my feelings? This nostalgia I feel for someone I no longer love – how am I to describe the pain and rancour? To be occupied – and then

suddenly to stop because overcome by a sudden sense of detachment, serene and blessed, as if some miraculous light had penetrated the room: how can one describe such an experience?

But a word of caution. Sometimes we start to play at thinking, when lo and behold, the game unexpectedly begins to play with us. Not a pleasant experience. Merely fruitful.

COSMONAUT ON EARTH

Long after the event, I find myself reflecting on the cosmonauts. Or rather on the first cosmonaut. Almost twenty-four hours after Gagarin's achievement, our reactions were already retarded when compared to the speed with which the event overtook us. So it is now very late indeed to be reconsidering the matter. And difficult to understand.

The other day, a boy, after being warned that his ball might fall to the ground and annoy the neighbours below, replied: Pooh! the world is now automatic, and if you throw the ball into the air with one hand, you automatically catch it with the other, so it cannot fall.

The problem is that my hand is still not sufficiently automatic. Gagarin went up with trepidation for, had the world's automation broken down, the ball would have done more serious damage than simply upset the neighbours below. So it was with trepidation that my hand, which can scarcely be described as automatic, trembled at the thought of not being quick enough to grasp this 'cosmonaut business' before it escaped me. The responsibility of trying to understand was overwhelming, the responsibility of catching the ball which had been thrown to me.

The need to make everything a little more logical – which in a sense is the same as being automatic – leads me to probe cautiously this awful fear which has gripped me:

– From now on, whenever I refer to the Earth I shall no longer say indiscriminately 'the world'. I shall consider the expression 'World map' as being quite inappropriate; whenever I say "my world", I shall remember with alarm and excitement that my map also needs to be modified, and that no one can guarantee that my world is not blue when seen from the outside. Some observations: before the appearance of the first cosmonaut, it would have been correct for someone to say, when speaking of their birth, 'I came into the world'. But it is not all that long

ago that we were born into the world. Feeling somewhat ill at ease.

– In order to see blue, we look up at the sky. The earth appears blue to anyone looking at it from the sky. So is blue a colour in itself or a question of distance? Or a question of deep nostalgia? The unattainable is always blue.

– If I were the first astronaut, my happiness could only be renewed if a second man from this world were to go back there: for he, too, would have seen. And no description can ever be the same as 'having seen'. Until another human being had also seen, I should feel a great silence inside me, even when speaking. Another observation: Let us suppose that someone in this world has already seen God. Without ever having said a word. For if no one else saw Him, there is no point in mentioning it.

– The great privilege of chance: that we should still be alive when this great world began. As to what lies ahead: we must smoke less, take better care of ourselves, in order to live longer and see a little more; as well as asking the scientists to get a move on – because our own time is running out.

SO MUCH EFFORT

She had a visitor. A former colleague arrived from São Paulo and came to see her. She welcomed her friend with tea and sandwiches, anxious to make the visit and their afternoon together as pleasant as possible. Her visitor turned up looking so lovely and so feminine. But as the hours passed, she began to fall apart little by little until she no longer looked quite as young or happy, her expression becoming more tense and embittered. Any superficial beauty was soon erased. And very soon the hostess was confronted by a woman who seemed less pretty yet somehow more attractive, as she sat there opening her heart as freely as in the old days, getting things muddled, indulging in platitudes to explain her thoughts, adamant that every woman should follow her own destiny and fulfil 'her own mission in life'. At this point the word *mission* must have struck her as being something of a cliché, not so much for her as for her hostess, who had been one of the brightest girls in their group. So she hastily corrected herself: '*mission*, or whatever you choose to call it.' The hostess fidgeted uneasily in her chair.

As her visitor left, she dragged her feet as if overcome by that weariness brought on by decisions which are much too premature for any action to be taken; all the decisions she had taken would take years to put into action. Or to lay aside. She went down in the lift with her friend and saw her out to the street. Seeing her from behind gave her quite a shock: the reverse of the coin revealed uncombed hair like that of a child, shoulders exaggerated by ill-fitting clothes, a short dress, thick legs. Yes. A marvellous but lonely woman. Struggling above all with her own prejudice which told her to be less than herself, ordered her to stoop. So much, so much effort, and those straggling hairs. Alongside her on the pavement, creatures passed who had clearly struggled less and were pursuing a more immediate destiny. The hostess could feel the burden of an awkward understanding in her breast: what could she do to help her? Incapable as she was of ever being able to transform that understanding into action.

– What am I to do? I am finding life unbearable. Life is so short, yet I find it unbearable.

– I can't help you. I feel the same. But there are things, lots of things. There comes a point when despair becomes light and love.

– And then?

– Then comes Nature.

– Are you confusing death with Nature?

– No. I'm identifying nature with Nature.

– Have all lives been like this?

– I believe so.

TORTURE AND GLORY

She was fat, short and freckled and her hair was much too frizzy. Her bust had become enormous while all the rest of us were flat-chested. And as if this were not bad enough, she would fill the top pockets of her blouse with toffees. But she had what any little girl who adored stories would like to have: a father who owned a bookshop.

She did not appear to benefit much from this good fortune; the rest of us even less so. Instead of giving us a little book for our birthday, she would hand us a postcard from her father's shop. And what is more, with a view of Recife and its bridges, the city where we ourselves lived. On the back she would write words like *happy birthday* and *greetings* in fancy lettering.

But there was such a cruel streak in her nature. Making loud noises as she sucked her toffees, she found ways and means of being vindictive. How this little girl must have hated us, we who were unforgivably pretty, slender and tall, with long, smooth hair. She practised her sadism on me with calm ferocity. I was so anxious to borrow books that I did not even notice the humiliations to which she subjected me: I kept on begging her to lend me the books she never bothered to read. Until that glorious day for her when she began to subject me to Chinese torture. She casually informed me that she possessed a copy of *As reinações de Narizinho* [The Adventures of Little Snotty].

It was a big book, dear God, a book one could live with, eat and sleep with. And well beyond my means. She told me to call at her house the next day and she would lend me the book. Waiting for the following day to come, I became transformed into the very promise of happiness: I was not living, but swimming slowly in tranquil waters.

Next day I went to her house, running all the way. She lived in a house, not in a first-floor apartment like me. She did not ask me in. Looking me straight in the eye, she told me she had loaned the book to another girl and to come back the day after to collect it. Dumbfounded, I slowly walked away, but hope soon returned and I began skipping again, a strange habit of mine, as I went through the streets of Recife. This time I did not

stumble once: the promise of that book guided me: the next day would soon be here, the following days were to be my whole life and I went skipping through the streets as usual without stumbling even once.

Fine, but there was more to come. The secret plan of the bookseller's daughter was calculated and diabolical. Next day I was back on her doorstep with a smile, my heart pounding with excitement. Only to hear the calm reply: the book had still not been returned and I was to return the following day. Little did I suspect that, for the rest of my life, this drama of waiting until the following day would recur time and time again while my heart went on pounding.

And so it continued. For how long? I could not say. She knew there could be no definite time before the hatred drained from that thick body of hers. I had already become aware that I was her chosen victim. Sometimes I can sense such things. Yet even though perceiving them, I often resign myself, as if the person who wishes to cause me suffering needs to see me suffer.

For how long? I went to her house every day without fail. Sometimes she would say: I had the book here yesterday but you didn't come so I loaned it to another girl. And, unusual for me, I began to feel dark circles forming round my startled eyes.

Until finally one day, as I was standing at her door, listening humbly and in silence to her excuses, the girl's mother appeared. She was obviously puzzled by the strange appearance of this girl who turned up day after day. She questioned both of us. There was silent confusion, interrupted by words which explained little or nothing. The girl's mother became more and more exasperated. Until the truth finally dawned on her. She turned to her daughter and exclaimed with great surprise: But that book has never left the house and you have shown no interest in reading it! This discovery was bad enough but not nearly as bad as discovering the kind of daughter she had. She looked at us in horror: this perverse daughter whom she scarcely recognized and the little girl standing at the door, weary and exposed to the wind-blown streets of Recife. Then, pulling herself together, she spoke firmly to her daughter without raising her voice: You will lend *The Adventures of Narizinho* to this child at once. And to me she said the one thing I had never dared hope to hear: 'And you must keep the book for as long as you like. Is that clear?' Those words meant more to me than being given the book: for as long as you like is all that anyone, young

or old, could possibly wish for.

How can I describe what followed? I was in a daze as I took the book. No, no, I did not go skipping off as usual. I went off, walking very slowly. I know that I was clutching the book in both hands, pressing it to my bosom. How long it took me to reach home is of no consequence. My breast was warm, my mood troubled and pensive.

On arriving home I did not start to read. I pretended not to have the book, so as to postpone the pleasure of discovering I had it. I opened the book some hours later and read some lines, I closed it once more, went wandering through the house, ate some bread and butter to pass the time, pretended I could not remember where I had put the book, found it again, opened it for several moments. I invented the most absurd strategies to postpone that clandestine thing called happiness. I felt proud yet insecure. I was a vulnerable queen.

Sometimes I would sit in the hammock, swinging back and forth in ecstasy, the book lying open on my lap yet never touching it. I was no longer a little girl with a book: I was a woman with her lover.

UNDYING LOVE

I still feel a little uncomfortable in my new role which cannot be strictly described as that of a columnist. And besides being a novice in the art of writing chronicles, I am also a novice when it comes to writing in order to earn money. I have had some experience as a professional journalist without ever signing my contributions. By signing my name I automatically become more personal. And I somehow feel as if I were selling my soul. I mentioned this to a friend who agreed: writing is rather like selling one's soul. It is true. Even when you are not doing it for money, you divulge a great deal about yourself. But a friend of mine who is a doctor disagreed: she argued that she puts body and soul into her work, although she still expects to be paid because she also has to earn a living. So with the greatest pleasure I sell you part of my soul when I converse with you every Saturday.

But my lack of experience in writing a weekly column gets me into a frightful muddle when it comes to choosing suitable topics. I was mulling over this problem when I happened to be visiting a friend. The telephone rang and the caller was a mutual acquaintance. I also had a word with him and naturally mentioned that I was writing a weekly column. I then asked him: 'Which topics are likely to interest readers? Let's say to interest the women who read my column?' Before he could answer, my friend called out from the far end of her large sitting-room: 'Men, of course.' We laughed, but her answer is worth considering. I am somewhat ashamed to have to admit that women are mostly interested in men.

But there is really nothing to be ashamed of, because no one can oblige us to prefer topics of wider interest. We need not feel embarrassed, for if we were to ask the most famous electronics engineer in the world what interests men most of all, the immediate and only truthful answer would have to be: women. From time to time we need to be reminded of this obvious fact however humiliating it may be. You might well ask me: 'But if we are talking about people, surely our children are our greatest interest?' The relationship is quite different. Children are, as the

saying goes, our flesh and blood, and the word interest is inappropriate. Children are something special. So much so that any child in this world could be our own flesh and blood. No, believe me, I am not indulging in fiction. I was once told about a little girl who was semi-paralytic. She would fly into a temper and take her revenge by breaking crockery. My blood ran cold. A daughter afflicted with cholera.

As for men, they are so appealing. Just as well. Are men a source of inspiration? Yes. Do they offer a challenge? Yes. Are they our enemies? Yes. Do they make stimulating rivals? Yes. Are men our equals and yet at the same time entirely different? Yes. Are men attractive? Yes. Are they amusing? Yes. Are men like little boys? Yes. Are men also fathers? Yes. Do we quarrel with men? We do. Can we get by without men to quarrel with? No. Are we interesting because men need interesting women? We are. Are our most important conversations with men? Yes. Can men be boring? They can. Do we enjoy being bored by men? We do.

I could go on with this interminable list until my editor tells me to stop. But I do not believe any one else would ask me to stop. For I am sure that I have touched on a sore point. And being a sore point, it hurts, the way men hurt us. And the way women hurt men.

With my mania for taxis, I started interviewing all the taxi-drivers. One night, the driver was a young Spaniard with a tiny moustache and sad expression. Chatting about this and that, he asked me if I had any children. I asked him the same question whereupon he told me that he was not married and had no intention of ever marrying. Then he told me his story. Fourteen years ago he had fallen in love with a young girl in his native Spain. She lived in a small village with few doctors or medical facilities. The girl suddenly became ill. No one could diagnose what was wrong and within three days she was dead. Aware that she was dying, she had told him: 'I shall die in your arms.' And beseeching God's help, she passed away in her lover's arms. The taxi-driver could neither eat nor sleep for almost three years. In that small village everyone knew of his tragic love affair and tried to help him. They took him to parties where the girls, instead of waiting to be asked, took the initiative and invited the men to dance with them.

But it was hopeless. Everywhere he went he was reminded of Clarita – that was the dead girl's name – and it gave me a shock

because her name was very similar to mine and I began to feel myself dead and loved. The young man finally decided to leave Spain without even telling his parents. He knew that there were only two countries at the time prepared to receive immigrants without sponsorship: Brazil and Venezuela. He chose Brazil where he soon made his fortune. First he set up a shoe factory and eventually sold it; then he opened a snack-bar and finally sold that as well. Nothing seemed to matter. He exchanged his car for a cab and became a taxi-driver. He lives in a house in Jacarepaguá 'where there are beautiful waterfalls with fresh water'. Yet during the last fourteen years he has not met any woman he could ever really love. Everything leaves him cold and indifferent. The Spaniard discreetly confided nevertheless that his constant longing for Clarita does not prevent him from having affairs with other women. But as for falling in love – never again.

So there! But then my story took an unexpected and alarming twist.

I had almost reached my destination when the taxi-driver started telling me once more about his house in Jacarepaguá and those waterfalls with *fresh water*, as if they could possibly have been with salt water. Almost inadvertently, I said: 'How I'd love to spend a few days resting in such a place.'

That was my mistake. At the risk of crashing into some building or other, he turned round sharply and asked me in an insinuating voice: 'Are you serious? Feel free at any time!' Thrown into panic by this sudden change of climate, I could hear myself quickly replying in a shrill voice that I could not possibly accept his invitation because I was about to have an operation and would be convalescing for several months. In future I shall only conduct interviews with elderly taxi-drivers. This little episode nevertheless proves that the Spaniard is an honest fellow: he does not allow his intense longing for Clarita to interfere with his everyday life.

The finale of my story is bound to disappoint those readers of a romantic disposition. Lots of people would prefer adolescent love to *haunt* them for the rest of their lives. It would make a better story. But I cannot tell a lie just to please my readers. Besides, I feel it is only right that the young Spaniard should not be haunted by the past. Incapable of ever falling in love again, surely he has already suffered enough.

I forgot to mention that he also talked about fraud and embez-

zlement in the business world – the journey took ages and the traffic was impossible. But his revelations fell on deaf ears. All that interested me was his tale of *undying love*. Some of the things he revealed about shady dealings in the business world are now coming back to me. Perhaps if I concentrate, I shall remember the details and be able to tell you next Saturday. But I doubt whether you would find them interesting.

PRAYER FOR A PRIEST

One night I mumbled a prayer for a priest who is afraid of dying and ashamed of being afraid. I humbly pleaded with God: Pacify the soul of Father X...make him feel YOUR presence, reassure him that death does not exist and that we are already part of eternity, convince him that to love is to survive, that to submit is not the same as dying. Grant him a little happiness each day, dissuade him from questioning You too deeply because the answer might be as enigmatic as the question, remind him that no one knows why a child longs for a mother's kiss, yet it does and that kiss is perfect. Help him to accept the world without fear since we have been created for this incomprehensible world and we ourselves are also incomprehensible, hence this connection between the mystery of the world and our own, but the connection eludes us as long as we strive to understand it. Bless him so that he may joyfully live the bread he eats, the dream he sleeps. Make him charitable towards himself, otherwise he will never be able to feel that God has loved him. Help him not to feel guilty just because he wishes someone to hold his hand at the hour of death, Amen. (Father X...had asked me to pray for him.)

NOT TO FEEL

Habit has deadened the blows. But now that he suffers less, he has lost the benefit of having sorrow as a warning sign. Today he is much more serene, yet his life is in greater danger: he could be one step away from death, one step away from being already dead, yet never know now that there is no suffering to warn him.

SEARCHING

A cat did so much wailing during the night that I have rarely felt such compassion for the living. It sounded like grief, and in human and animal terms that is what it was. But could it have

been sorrow, or was it 'searching', that is to say 'searching for'? For everything alive is searching for something or someone.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS HENCE

Someone once asked me if I could envisage Brazil twenty-five years hence. Not even twenty-five minutes hence, let alone twenty-five years. But my impression-cum-desire is that in the near future we may come to regard the present upheavals as the first essential stages before achieving an economic situation more worthy of every man, woman and child. The Brazilian people have already shown themselves to be more politically mature than most of the country's politicians, and it is the people who will end up leading our so-called leaders. Twenty-five years hence the voice of the people will be heard.

But if I cannot predict the future, I can at least express my hopes. And I hope with all my heart that our most serious problem will be resolved: that of hunger. Without having to wait for twenty-five years because there is no time to be lost: thousands of men, women and children walk the streets like corpses when they should be receiving treatment in hospital for malnutrition. There is so much poverty in our midst that the government would be fully justified in declaring a state of emergency as if the country were facing a national crisis. Only the situation is much worse: starvation has become endemic and is already inseparable from our body and soul. And when people describe the physical, moral and mental characteristics of the Brazilian people, they nearly always ignore that what they are really describing are the physical, moral and mental symptoms of hunger. Those leaders who are striving for an economic solution to the food problem will have our blessing just as the world at large will bless those who finally discover a cure for cancer.

SPRING STIRS IN MY TYPEWRITER

The first warm days of the new season, as ancient as that first breath of air. I cannot help smiling. And without even glancing in the mirror, my smile has the foolishness of angels.

Signs appeared long before the arrival of the new season: the wind suddenly lost its chill, the first hint of milder weather. It is inconceivable that this mildness should not bring other consolations, my breaking heart tells me.

Inconceivable, echoes the warmth of spring, still biting and fresh. Inconceivable that this air should not bring universal love! repeats my parched heart breaking into a smile. Failing to recognise that what it has brought is love itself. This initial warmth which is still fresh brings: everything. Everything, intact and undivided.

And everything is excessive for this heart of mine which has suddenly weakened and can only bear so much, only love so much and that a little at a time. I find myself assailed by vague yet pungent memories of this very day. Feelings I have never shared with anyone. Not even with myself? Only in so far as the sharpness of what is good can penetrate these fragile nerves, these sweet deaths. Oh, how I long to die. As yet I do not know what it means to die – what paths are still open to me. To die will have the same indivisible pungency of what is good. To whom shall I bequeath my death? A death with that initial warmth and freshness of the new season. Oh, how much more bearable and coherent suffering is than this promise of spring's vague and chilling happiness. It is with this humility that I hope to die: the pungency of what is good. But never to die before really dying: for it is so consoling to prolong that promise. I wish cunningly to prolong it. I cleanse myself, nourish myself on all that is best in life, for nothing is too good for me as I prepare for the new season. I crave the best lotions and perfumes, the best kind of life, I cherish the greatest hopes, seek out the best meats, no matter whether light or heavy, I want my flesh to disintegrate into spirit and that same spirit to dissolve into flesh, I crave these subtle mixtures – anything and everything capable of secretly preparing me for those first moments about to come.

Initiated, I can prophesy the change of season. And I wish my life to mature like some enormous fruit. Inside this fruit which germinates within me, inside this succulent fruit there is room for the mildest of insomnias. As I lie awake insomnia becomes my wisdom, a veiled alertness, barely sharp enough just to be able to prophesy. Oh, how much nicer to be able to prophesy than that unbearable pungency of what is good. Nor must I forget that happiness is the most difficult thing of all to understand in this artful struggle. Nor must I forget that the most arduous wind-blown slope of all is to smile with happiness. For whenever I stay there too long and I try to embrace its hollow vastness, tears of weariness come to my eyes: I weaken before the beauty of what exists and is about to exist. And this continuous preparation prevents me from taking possession of life's first rejoicing.

Will I succeed in capturing the joy – so infinitely sweet – of dying? Oh, how it distresses me not to be able to live a better life in order to die a better death. How it distresses me to think that anyone should fail to understand that I shall die en route to the absurd happiness of spring. But I have no desire to anticipate that happiness. – My vestal vigil is to await its coming. By day and night my candle remains lit, its flame burns brightly in the greatest of all vigils. The first warmth of spring... that is love! Happiness bestows a filial smile. My hair is carefully groomed. But I can scarcely contain this waiting any longer. It feels so good that I run the risk of exceeding myself, of losing my first death in springtime, of dying prematurely in the moist warmth of all this waiting. Of dying too soon because of my curiosity; impatient as I am to experience the new season.

But I shall wait, I shall play for time, cautiously nibbling each tiny crumb and suppressing my greed. I want everything because nothing is too good for my death which is also my life and so eternal that it exists even now.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

So this was happiness. And for no apparent reason. From the beginning there was a feeling of emptiness. Then my eyes filled with tears: tears of happiness, but because I am mortal, my love for this world transcends me. My love for this mortal life gently killed it off little by little. And what am I to do? What am I to do with happiness? What am I to do with this strange, barbed tranquillity which is already causing me pain akin to anguish or to some great silence? To whom shall I bequeath this happiness which is already beginning to tear me apart and frighten me? No, no, I have no desire to be happy. I prefer mediocrity. Oh, there are thousands of people who do not have the courage to persevere at least a little longer in this mysterious state known as feeling oneself to be happy. They prefer mediocrity.

SWEARING IN THE THEATRE

Personally I am not in the habit of swearing because when I was a child such words were never used at home and I learned to express my feelings with other forms of speech. But swear-words – those rude utterances capable of expressing what other words cannot convey – do not shock me. There are plays such as Pinter's *The Homecoming* (with an outstanding performance by Fernanda Montenegro) or *Dois perdidos numa noite suja* [Two Lost Souls on a Dirty Night] by Plínio Marcos (with some fine acting from Fawzi Arap and Nélson Xavier) which simply would not work without using swear words because of their ambience and the type of characters they portray. Both plays are excellent and it would be quite wrong to attempt to tamper with the text.

Besides, people who go to the theatre are usually aware, if only from hearsay, of the kind of play they are about to see. If they get upset or shocked when they hear actors swearing, then why buy a ticket in the first place?

Furthermore, plays are censored and admission is often restricted to adult audiences, which offers some form of protection. Although nowadays most teenagers are familiar with swear-words long before they reach the age of sixteen.

So what harm is there in using swear-words on stage if they can be justified in the text? Whether one likes it or not, there is no denying that swear-words play an important part in colloquial Portuguese.

CHACRINHA?

I had heard so much about Chacrinha that I decided to watch his programme on television. It seemed to me to go on for much longer than an hour.

And I was astounded. People assure me this is the most popular programme on television today. But why? Chacrinha is quite mad and I am using the word *mad* in its real sense. He plays to a packed auditorium. Some sort of talent contest as far as I could gather. It is televised at the so-called *peak hour*. Chacrinha appears in the most outrageous clothes, each contestant does his turn and if the audience is unimpressed Chacrinha blows his trumpet and the poor performer is sent off. I also find something sadistic about Chacrinha: you can sense the satisfaction he gets from blowing that trumpet. And he goes on and on repeating the same old jokes – so either he has no imagination or he is blind.

And what about the contestants? How depressing to watch them. They can be any age. But young or old, they all betray the same eagerness to appear on stage, to show what they can do, to become famous, even at the cost of being ridiculed and humiliated. Some of them are in their seventies. But with few exceptions, they are people of humble origin and look undernourished. And how the audience applauds. There are money prizes for those who can guess the number of times Chacrinha blows on his trumpet. All they have to do is to write in giving the correct answer: at least that was how it was done in the programme I saw. Could it be this chance to win money as if it were a lottery which makes the programme so popular? Or could it be the low mentality of the Brazilian masses? Or could it be because those viewing the programme are sufficiently sadistic themselves to derive pleasure from the sadism of Chacrinha?

Frankly I am puzzled. By and large, television in this country is inferior, with far too many commercials. But Chacrinha is unbelievably bad. I simply cannot understand his success. And watching his programme made me sad and disillusioned. What I should like to see is a more discerning public.

DIES IRAE

I wake up in a rage. I am thoroughly dissatisfied with this world. Most people are dead without realizing it or they live like charlatans. And instead of giving, love makes demands. Those who show us affection expect us at least to satisfy some of their needs. Telling lies brings remorse. And not to lie is a gift the world does not deserve. And I am not even capable of smashing crockery like the semi-paralysed little girl when she took her revenge. I am not semi-paralysed. Although something deep down tells me that we are all semi-paralysed. And we die without so much as an explanation. And worst of all – we live without so much as an explanation. And having maids, whom we might as well call servants, is an offence to humanity. And to be obliged to be what is described as presentable irritates me. Why can I not go around in rags like those men I sometimes see in the street with beards down to their chests and a bible in one hand, these gods who have transformed insanity into a means of understanding? And just because I have done a little writing, why do people assume I must go on being a writer? I warned my children that I had woken up in a rage and advised them to ignore me. But I am in no mood to ignore anything. I should like to do something once and for all to burst this straining tendon which sustains my heart. And what about those who give up? I know a woman who gave up. And she seems quite contented: her way of coping with life is to keep herself occupied. But no occupation satisfies her. And nothing I have ever done satisfies me. Anything I did with love ended up in pieces. I did not even know how to love, not even how to love. And now they have set aside a Day for Illiterates. I only read the headline but refused to read the text. I refuse to read the text of the world's affairs, the headlines are enough to make my blood boil. There is always some commemoration or other, some war being fought every five minutes. A whole world of semi-paralysed human beings. And everyone waiting in vain for a miracle. And those who are not waiting for a miracle are in an even worse state and ought to start smashing crockery. And the churches are full of those who fear God's wrath. And of those who plead for mercy which is the opposite of wrath.

No, no, I do not feel sorry for those who die of hunger. What I feel is rage. And I can see no harm in stealing to eat. – I have just been interrupted by a telephone call from a girl called Teresa who was delighted that I actually remembered her. I remember: she was a stranger who used to come and visit me in the hospital where I was a patient for almost three months after getting burned in a fire. She would sit down at my bedside, saying little or nothing. And then suddenly depart. And now she was telephoning me to express her frank opinion: that I should not write columns or any such thing for the newspapers. That she was not alone in hoping that I would give up my weekly column however well paid. That lots of people were buying my books in the hope of finding the same topics I dealt with in the newspaper. I kept saying yes because I would have liked it to be yes, and partly to show Teresa that I am not semi-paralysed and can still say yes.

Yes, dear God. To be able to say yes. Yet at that very moment something strange happened. I was writing in the morning when the sky suddenly became so dark that I had to switch on the light. Then the telephone rang once more: a call from a friend in a state of terror who wanted to know if the sky was dark here too. Yes, as dark as night and at ten o'clock in the morning. It is the wrath of God. And if this darkness should turn to rain, may the great flood return but without Noah's Ark. For we have failed to make a world fit to live in and afflicted with paralysis we do not know how to live. For if the flood should not come back, Sodom and Gomorrah will return and that would solve the problem. Why allow two of each species to enter the Ark? At least human couples have produced nothing except children, but not the other non-existent life which made me wake up in a rage.

Teresa, when you visited me in hospital, you saw me bandaged up and immobilised. Today you would find me even more immobilised. Today I am paralysed and mute. And if I try to speak, all that comes out is a mournful growl. So it is not only rage? No, there is sadness as well.

YES

I said to a friend:
– Life has always asked too much of me.
She replied:
– But don't forget that you also ask too much of life.
That is true.

SPRING SONATA IN SWITZERLAND

Winter in Berne is about to be buried – and behold the countryside, thousands of plants sprouting everywhere. Leaves, new leaves, how am I to wrest you from the wind? A fit of sneezing, and then another, the symptoms of spring, as I stand sniffling and watchful behind the window-panes. The threads of a spider's web on my fingers, the well visible in the garden – and a fresh, pungent smell coming from the tiny flowers in shades of yellow and gold. Leaves, new leaves, how am I to wrest you from the breeze? Where shall I hide in those great open spaces? I have lost those hidden corners where one could meditate. But if I put on my white dress and go out... I shall be lost in the light – be lost again and again – as I take a slow leap on to another plane. And how shall I find spring in this absence of mine? Rosa, iron the darkest of my black dresses. On these planes of successive calm – as I go from one to the other and then another – I shall be the only possible me, barely moving from one century to the next in this transparent silence, oh unkind spring. Or perhaps I shall race through this new era – crossing this new world bereft of any pathways – with a thousand glorious sneezes and a thousand plants. I shall only stop to catch my breath where my heart starts beating, the only milestone in your desert, spring: I dressed in black and you in gold, I with a flower in my hair, you with a thousand flowers in yours, so that we may recognize each other. And as a further sign, I shall hold a book in one hand and great uncertainty in the other. I am tall and have this wretched cold: you will recognize me by my handkerchief and sneezing. And amidst this hateful and desolate atmosphere which I breathe and inhale – I shall recognize you by your opaque wind and by my defiant outburst of sneezing.

In this dormant spring, goats drowse in the fields. On the hotel terrace there is a fish in the aquarium. And on the hills a solitary fawn. Days, days, days and then – in the fields there is wind, the impudent dreams of goats, a hollow fish in the aquarium – the sudden urge to steal in spring, and that full-blooded fawn taking solitary leaps. Naturally, but only until summer comes and ripens a hundred thousand apples for autumn.

I eat the fruit and throw half of it away for I have never felt compassion in spring. I drink water straight from the street-fountain without drying my mouth with my handkerchief. I have lost my handkerchief just as I have lost the winter, I have no regrets for I have never felt compassion in spring. As for the pool, I spend hours there, shivering in the last cold hours of winter, shivering with the first frosts to settle on the leaves. Just look at the pool! I look at it with hatred. I have never felt compassion in spring.

Insomnia rouses the dimly-lit city, there is not a door or window without a light. What are they waiting for? They wait. The heated cinemas have already emptied. Insects swarm around the street-lamps. The last of the snow melted some time ago. On the river bank couples crowd the tables. Some of the children are asleep on their laps while others doze off on the hard flagstones. The men and women hold weary conversations. Worst of all is this unnerving activity as the street-lamps of Berne drone with mosquitoes. Oh, how far, how far we have walked. Grit in our sandals, as we wander aimlessly. Patience is running out, this is becoming tedious. Oh, there is the Cathedral at last, refuge, darkness.

But the Cathedral is warm and open.

And full of mosquitoes.

SOLEMN PUNISHMENT

On my first day at the João Barbalho Nursery School in the Rua Formosa in Recife I met Leopoldo. And by the following day we had become impossible: the two worst-behaved children in the class. Throughout the entire year we were reprimanded daily by the teacher – but for some curious reason she liked us, despite all the trouble we gave her. She tried to keep us apart without success. Leopoldo and I simply shouted to each other across the room which made it even more difficult to maintain any discipline. Eventually, we passed into the first grade of primary school. We continued to live up to our reputation. We were impossible when it came to discipline. We received top marks for everything except good conduct.

Until the formidable headmistress appeared in class one day and began conversing in whispers with our teacher. I shall tell you immediately what was actually said before confiding my reactions. The Education Authorities were hoping to raise standards in State Schools by means of regular tests. If any children in the teacher's opinion appeared to be much brighter than the other children in the class they were to be set a special test and, if they passed, moved into a higher grade. That was all the headmistress had to report.

After she left the room, the teacher announced: Leopoldo and Clarice will sit a little test along with the children in Grade Four. I was now about to experience the humiliation of a lifetime. The teacher gave no further explanations. But the fact that our two names had once more been linked together convinced me that we were about to face severe punishment. For all my high spirits, I could be a cry-baby and I began sobbing quietly to myself. Leopoldo tried to console me and assured me there was nothing to cry about. But it was no good: I was ridden with guilt. I had been born in mortal sin.

We soon found ourselves in the classroom occupied by Grade Four, lost among children much bigger than ourselves, confronted with an unfriendly teacher and in alien surroundings. I became more and more terrified and the tears were now rolling down my cheeks and onto my uniform. Leopoldo and I were sitting near

each other. Printed sheets of paper were handed round, as the grim-faced teacher bellowed out strange words of warning:

– Until I say *Now!* you must not look at the paper. And the moment I say *Stop!* you will put your pens down at once.

We received our papers. Leopoldo looking relaxed as I got into an even greater panic. I had never sat a test before and had no idea what I was supposed to do. And when the tyrant suddenly called out 'Now!', my muffled sobs grew louder. Apart from my father, Leopoldo was the first male to offer me protection and he played his part so well that for the rest of my life I came to accept and rely on male protection. It was Leopoldo who encouraged me to stop crying, to calm down and read the questions and to answer as best I could. It was hopeless: my paper was soon soaking wet and when I tried to read the print, I could not see for tears. I did not write a single word. I wept and suffered as I was to weep and suffer many years later but for quite different reasons. Leopoldo kept watching me as he continued to write.

When the teacher shouted 'Stop!' I still could not stop crying. She called me out. I had nothing to say for myself. She then tried to explain to me how the brighter children from other classes etc. I only began to understand several days later once I got over the shock. I never heard the outcome of the test, and I am not even sure that we were supposed to know.

When I was in the Third Grade, I changed schools. And when I went to sit the entrance examination for the Ginásio Pernambucano, I met up with Leopoldo again. It was as if we had never been separated and he continued to protect me. I can remember that I once used some slang expression without realizing it could cause offence. Leopoldo rebuked me: 'You must never use that expression.' 'Why not?' 'You'll find out one day', he replied.

I was already in my third year at High School when my parents moved to Rio. And it was many years later that I saw Leopoldo for the last time and quite by chance, in the street. We had become two introspective human beings who travelled on the same tram with virtually nothing to say to each other. We had become impossible in another sense.

Leopoldo is better known as Leopoldo Nachbin. I later discovered that as a first-year student of engineering he proved a theorem which had hitherto been considered unsolvable. Leopoldo was invited to the Sorbonne to demonstrate the theorem and he went on to become one of the world's greatest mathematicians.

As for me, I do not cry nearly as much nowadays.

IN FAVOUR OF FEAR

I am convinced that at some time during the Stone Age I was definitely ill-treated by some man who loved me. Ever since then I have been haunted by a secret terror.

It so happened that one warm evening I was having polite conversation with a man of some breeding. He was dressed in a dark suit, with well-manicured hands. I was sitting there eating some guavas and feeling *completely relaxed*, as Sérgio Porto would say, when suddenly the man asked me: 'Shall we go for a walk?'

No. I am going to be blunt. What he really said was: 'Shall we take a *little stroll*?'

Why he should say *little stroll* I never did discover. Because suddenly, from a height of thousands of centuries, the first stone of an avalanche came tumbling down: it was my heart. Who could it have been? Who could have taken me for that *little stroll* in the Stone Age from which I never returned because I ended up staying there?

I do not know what element of terror exists in the monstrous delicacy of that expression *a little stroll*.

Once my first heart came rolling down and I had wickedly devoured those guavas, I felt foolish but terrified at the prospect of some improbable danger.

I can now say improbable, reassured as I am by civilized customs, by a strict police force, and my own ability to escape as fast as the most slippery of eels. Yet I should dearly love to know what I would have said in the Stone Age when, looking like a female ape they shook me from my leafy arbour. Such nostalgia! I really must spend some time in the countryside.

Having swallowed my tiny guavas, I turned pale without the colour draining altogether from my face: my fear was much too vertical in time to leave any traces on the surface. Besides, it was not fear. It was terror. It was my entire future disintegrating. This man, who was my equal, murdered me for love. For this is what they call love and they are right.

A little stroll? Those are the words the wolf used when he spoke to Little Red Riding Hood, who got wise only after the

event. 'Just in case of lurking danger, beneath the leaves I'll build my nest' – where had I heard these lines before? I cannot remember, but the people of Pernambuco know what they are talking about.

May the Man forgive me if he should recognize himself in this tale of fear. Let him take comfort from the fact that I was to blame. I should have accepted his invitation without suspicion, as well as the roses he sent beforehand: such kindness, the night was warm, his car waiting outside. And he should know that – in the simplistic division the centuries imposed on me between good and evil – I know that he was A GOOD MAN, LIVED IN A CAVE, ONLY HAS FIVE WIVES, DOES NOT BEAT ANY OF THEM, ALL FIVE WIVES LIVE CONTENTEDLY.

And I beg of him to try and understand – I appeal to his good humour – for I know that an indecisive man like him uses the expression *a little stroll* quite naturally while for me those words conveyed the terrible threat of sweetness. I must thank him for this expression. Never having heard those words before, they left me deeply shocked.

Being polite, I explained to the Man that I could not take *a little stroll*. The centuries have prepared me and now I am as refined as any woman even if I choose to take the precaution of building my nest beneath the leaves to avoid any danger.

The Man did not insist, although it would not be true to say he was pleased. We confronted each other for less than a fraction of a second – after thousands of years we have come to understand each other much better, and now it takes less than a fraction of a second – we confronted each other and that no, however mumbled, echoed loudly against the walls of the cavern which have always been more favourable to the desires of Man.

After the Man's sudden retreat, here I am, safe but still shaken. Have I escaped a *little stroll* which might easily have cost me my life? Nowadays it is all too common to lose one's life by chance.

Once the Man had gone, I realized that I was overjoyed and a completely new person. Oh, not because of his invitation. For thousands of years we women have continually been invited to go for a walk, we are used to it and happy to accept without being pushed. I was happy and transformed – but out of fear.

Because I am in favour of fear.

For certain fears – if they are not demeaning and have indestructible roots – have given me my most incomprehensible

reality. The illogical nature of my fears fascinates me, gives me an aura which can be disconcerting. I can barely conceal beneath this modest smile my extraordinary gift for succumbing to fear.

But in the case of this particular fear, I keep asking myself what could possibly have happened to me in the Stone Age? It was clearly something unnatural, otherwise I should not have been left with this tendency to look sideways, or have become so discreetly invisible, cunningly assuming the colour of the shadows and greenery, always keeping well into the side when walking along pavements and adopting a brisk pace. It had to be unnatural, otherwise it would never have frightened me, given my nature and circumstances. Or could it have been that even in that age when people lived in caves – where I continue to retire in secrecy – could it have been that even then I invented this *neurosis* about the motives behind that *little stroll*?

The answer is yes, but there is nothing wrong with having an oblique heart, it is a lighthouse, a compass, wisdom, sharp instinct, experience of death, the power to divine a disquieting but blissful lack of adjustment, because I am discovering that my own maladjustment stems from my origins. For everyone knows that mosquitoes are a sign of heavy rain, that to cut my hair under a new moon will give it greater strength, to mention a name I dare not utter will cause delays and great misfortune, and tying the devil with red string to the leg of a piece of furniture has at least tied up my demons. And I know in my heart – which has never dared expose itself in the centre, and for centuries has kept well to the left under the cover of shadows – I know full well that Man is such a stranger, even unto himself, that innocence alone makes him natural.

No, this oblique heart of mine is right, even if the facts soon prove me wrong. *A Little Stroll* brings certain death, and the victim's startled face remains with glassy eyes staring up at that complacent moon.

A PERFECT ENCOUNTER

When Maria Bonomi came to Rio we had lunch together in a restaurant, with a bottle of heavy, red wine which sent me into a deep sleep for several hours without any nightmares. While I was asleep, Maria took the plane back to São Paulo where she lives with her husband Antunes, one of Brazil's best theatre-directors, and with Cássio, my godson. Cássio had a complaint to make about me: all his friends had a godmother who lived nearby while the only contact he had with me was through an occasional photograph in the São Paulo newspapers. I learned he had already had two girlfriends and that he had broken off his affair with the second one because she beat him up. Never! Surely it is always the man who beats up the woman. I decided to act on a friend's advice and buy him a machine-gun, the kind that gives off sparks and makes a lot of noise. This would allow him to work off his male aggression which had been so deeply wounded by his latest girlfriend. And one of these days I shall travel to São Paulo just to be with my godson. I shall avoid seeing anyone else and devote myself entirely to him. Besides, I am afraid Antunes might try to persuade me to write a play for him to direct, in the same way Martim Gonçalves directs in Rio. Although even that would be less difficult than writing the film-script Khouri and Maurício Ritner kept asking me to write. One of their arguments is that everything I write has a strong visual quality. If this be true, I am not conscious of it. Were I to start aiming deliberately for visual impact in my writing, I should get into the most awful muddle.

But coming back to my dear friend and confidante, Maria Bonomi Antunes, I can no longer remember whether I first met her in Washington or New York. She has scarcely changed since those days. Nowadays she is, if anything, more attractive, with a devil-may-care attitude and laughing eyes which suddenly become serious the minute the conversation turns to her creative work. Maria combines a clear mind with keen instinct, which makes her a complete person. My first encounter with her was so decisive that when we said goodbye, Maria simply said 'See you tomorrow'. I found renewal in Maria and I hope she renewed

herself a little in me, although there was no need in her case.

From the outset, we told each other everything about ourselves. Then I asked her about her work. She can scarcely believe the amount of work she is doing and selling, and success is beginning to bother her. She has even been obliged to employ a secretary. I can see her problem. My modest *success* in literary circles often makes me lose any sense of intimacy with my typewriter. I do not have a secretary because my business affairs are almost non-existent: I ring up publishers when the need arises and keep postponing indefinitely any replies to publishing houses abroad. We talked about *success*. Maria believes that on reaching that impasse, the only solution is to turn professional. I have always been an amateur, a compulsive amateur it is true, but nevertheless an amateur. And I have some misgivings about turning professional. This does not worry Maria: she is going through a creative phase at present.

As for my own work, she finds my latest novel premature, even in relation to myself: she feels that I wrote it much too quickly in an attempt to bring my work full circle.

We also discovered that we are both long-sighted which obliges us to read with spectacles, although we can see ever more clearly from a distance. Another characteristic we share which is clearly symbolic.

I am now seriously thinking of turning professional. It would be no bad thing. The moment has arrived when the i's must be dotted: this will be one way of taking myself in hand, whatever the difficulties.

We conversed for ages and I suspect that Maria missed her plane in the end. She was supposed to check in at the airport by three o'clock in the afternoon but it was already three o'clock when she dropped me off at my apartment. Antunes would be furious: he was anxiously waiting for her to return. They had invited Antonio Callado to stay with them and Antunes needed Maria so that she could attend to the domestic arrangements and make their guest comfortable. Maria and I also discussed the problem of being expected to play the housewife just when you are trying to concentrate on your work as an artist. Can these two roles be reconciled? But women always end up reconciling them. That is their special gift.

We spoke about the importance of getting enough nourishment and sleep. Perhaps that is why I slept for so long after lunch. This disrupted my telephone call to Otto Lara Resende:

it was Sunday and when I rang him he was asleep. By the time he rang me back, it was my turn to be fast asleep. I ended up putting my question to Otto's wife, Helena. It was half-past ten in the evening before I succeeded in getting any reply and I caught her just as she was on her way to visit Hélio Pelegrino. We moaned cheerfully to each other about how tired we both felt. But at half-past ten at night I was wide awake: I had just seen *Corpo ardente* [Burning Passion], a film directed by Khouri. I would have gone to see any film directed by him. But on this occasion there had been another reason. Marly de Oliveira, my godchild through marriage, and Maria Bonomi had both insisted that Barbara Laage, the actress starring in the film, looked just like me. Maria added: that's to say when you are sitting still and not fidgeting. Actually the actress does resemble me. Naturally I am referring to her good looks. Another friend commented there is less resemblance around the mouth and chin because my expression is much softer. I felt rather uncomfortable watching myself on the screen. But I envied the actress her costumes and thought I had as much right to them as her because we were so alike. But what I really enjoyed was the black horse which appeared in the film. The animal moved with such grace and freedom, and its long neck and white-dappled head were beautiful to watch. Frankly, I identified more readily with the black horse than with Barbara Laage. Besides, I had a way of tossing my hair back which also suggested a bid for freedom. Fortunately, I no longer need to make such gestures. Only on the rare occasion.

But to get back to my happy encounter with Maria. We even ate well without paying too much attention to the food: we were so wrapped up in each other. Maria, did you or did you not miss the three-thirty plane in the end? And did you pass on my message to Antonio Callado? Unless he realized it was a joke, he is going to be very annoyed with me. Goodbye for now, Maria. I promise to visit Cássio in São Paulo. And if possible, I'll send on the machine-gun beforehand so that he might take his just revenge.

WHEN TO WEEP

There is one kind of weeping which is wholesome and another which is harmful. The harmful kind is when the tears go on flowing yet bring no relief. They are simply draining and exhausting. So a friend suggested that the latter might be compared with the weeping of a child suffering from the pangs of hunger. She was right. When you feel yourself close to this kind of weeping, better to try to suppress your tears: weeping will do no good. Better to try to be strong, and face up to the situation. It is difficult, but preferable to becoming weak to the extent of turning pale.

But it is not always necessary to be strong. We must respect our weakness. Then our tears become gentle with that legitimate sadness to which we are entitled. They fall slowly and as they touch our lips we can feel the clean, salty taste, the fruit of our deepest sorrow.

It is moving to see a man crying. The natural fighter, he has recognized that the struggle can sometimes be futile. I have a deep respect for the man who sheds tears. I have seen men crying.

THE QUIET WOMAN FROM MINAS

Aninha is a quiet woman from Minas who works here at our house. And when she speaks, which is very rarely, her voice sounds muffled. I have never had a maid called Aparecida, yet every time I am about to call Aninha, the only name that comes to mind is Aparecida. Aninha moves through the house like a silent apparition. One morning she was tidying up a corner of the sitting-room as I sat sewing in the opposite corner. Suddenly – no, not suddenly, nothing is sudden with her, but rather like a long, drawn-out silence – I could hear her voice asking me, as if reluctant to break the silence: 'Does Madam write books?' Taken aback, I said yes. Without interrupting her work or raising her voice, she asked me if I could lend her one of my books. I felt embarrassed but decided to speak frankly. I told her I did not think she would enjoy my books because they are rather complicated. Whereupon, still tidying up and with her voice

sounding even more muffled, she replied: 'I like complicated things. I can't stomach *sugared water*.'

THE CLAIRVOYANT

Jandira is the cook. But as strong as a horse. So strong that she is clairvoyant. One of my sisters was paying me a visit. Jandira came into the room, looked at her seriously and unexpectedly announced: 'This trip Madam is hoping to make will happen, Madam is going through a very happy period in her life right now.' And with these words she bustled out of the room. My sister looked at me in astonishment. Somewhat embarrassed, I made a weak gesture with my hands as if to say there was nothing I could do, while at the same time explaining: 'It so happens she is clairvoyant.' My sister calmly replied: 'I see. Well, never mind, every woman gets the servants she deserves.'

GRATITUDE

This same Jandira – may God preserve her, she is such an excellent cook – on the day I raised her wages as promised, started counting the notes to see if the amount was correct while I sat there waiting. When she had finished counting, she did not say a word but leaned over and kissed my left shoulder. How odd!

THE THING

But the other maid I employed was no joke. I would say: 'Ivone'. She would go on sweeping with her back to me. I would repeat: 'Ivone'. No reaction. I would try again: 'Ivone, will you please answer when I speak to you?' Whereupon she would turn round in a flash and scream at me: 'That's enough!'

Some months later, I was giving her the money one morning to do the shopping when the same thing happened again, and this time I lost my patience. Without raising my voice I told her: 'Now it's my turn to say, "that's enough". I want you to look for another job and I hope you'll be happy there.' Her mood changed at once and in the gentlest, sweetest tone of voice imaginable, she said submissively: 'Yes, Madam.' And since leaving my house, she has telephoned on a number of occasions and even pays me the odd visit.

LURKING BEHIND DEVOTION

You may remember my telling you about my maid, Aninha; I told you she was from Minas and that she was very quiet. On the rare occasions she ever said anything, she spoke in a low voice which seemed to come from beyond the grave. I also told you how she surprised me one day by asking in that muffled voice of hers if she could borrow one of my books, and when I explained that they are complicated, how she quickly replied in the same tone of voice that she could not stomach *sugared water*.

Well now, Aninha has changed. How she has blossomed since coming to work here! She even initiates conversations and her voice is much clearer these days. Reluctant to lend her one of my books and to have the entire house reeking of literature, I pretended I had forgotten. But, as a peace-offering, I made her a present of a detective story which I had translated. After a few days, she informed me: 'I've finished reading it. It wasn't bad but a bit childish. I'd have preferred to read one of your own books.' This woman from Minas is stubborn. And she did actually use the word *childish*.

In the same article, I also mentioned this strange habit of mine of calling her Aparecida. The fact is that I have never had a maid called Aparecida, not even a friend or acquaintance with this name. One day in a moment of distraction, I unwittingly called out: 'Aparecida!' Unperturbed, she asked me: 'Who is this Aparecida?' The moment had arrived for an explanation which I was unable to give. I ended up saying to her: 'I don't know why I keep calling you Aparecida.' Still sounding a little muffled, she suggested: 'Perhaps it's because I just appeared from nowhere.' That was all very fine, but not a satisfactory explanation. Jandira, our cook, who is also clairvoyant, decided she would unravel the mystery. She suggested that the Holy Virgin of Aparecida was protecting me and that each time I unwittingly invoked Her name, the Virgin was sending me a sign from Heaven. Jandira was not simply offering an opinion, she was advising me. I was to light a candle before the shrine of the Holy Virgin of Aparecida and make a wish. This idea appealed to me.

After all, there was no harm in trying. I asked her if she would light the candle on my behalf. She agreed but insisted how important it was that I should pay for the candle myself. As I handed her the money, she warned me that this was the moment to make my wish. It had been made a long time ago and only had to be renewed with fervour: Holy Virgin of Aparecida, hear my prayer. What I wish for is both just and urgent and I have been waiting for such a long time.

Speaking of housemaids – who have always made me feel guilty of exploitation – I felt much worse after seeing Genet's play *The Maids*, brilliantly directed by Martim Gonçalves. The play distressed me. I began to understand how maids really feel about their mistresses, to realize that their devotion is one of implacable hatred. In Genet's play, the two maids *know* that their mistress must die. But their servility is much too deeply ingrained to be overcome. And instead of poisoning their tyrannical mistress, one of the maids takes the poison herself while the other is condemned to a lifetime of remorse and suffering.

Sometimes the hatred is not apparent, having been concealed by protestations of devotion and self-abnegation. I once had an Argentinian maid who was like that. To all appearances, she adored me. Looking my worst as I emerged from the bathroom with a towel wrapped round my head, María del Carmen (that was her name) would exclaim: 'Madam, you look beautiful.' She was much given to flattery. And whenever I asked her to do anything, she would reply: 'Why, of course, Madam! Now you will see how we Argentinian maids know how to please! I am here to carry out your every wish.' I had engaged her without any references. Then the penny dropped. Before coming to me, María had worked in dubious hotels where her work consisted of making beds and changing the sheets. She had no references. She had also worked in the theatre. I took pity on her and felt certain that she must have played the part of the maid who comes on stage and announces: 'Dinner is served, Madam.' One day, the actress Tonia Carrero came to have coffee and when the maid left the room I confided that she was a fellow-artiste, whereupon Tonia suggested she might be under contract to Walter Pinto for one of his sexy revues. María exchanged a brief conversation with Tonia which was most odd. Tonia: 'So, you're from Argentina.' María del Carmen: 'Yes, I'm ashamed to admit.' Tonia: 'What is there to be ashamed of? I love Argentina and have lots of dear friends there.' After Tonia had gone, María

remarked: 'What a pretty and delightful *muchacha*!' This time, the compliment was not flattery, but sincere admiration. María del Carmen was extremely vain. She bought false eyelashes which needed trimming and made her eyes look like those of a doll. She eventually disappeared without a word of warning.

Another maid, who accompanied me to the United States, married an English engineer whom she met there, and she remained behind when I finally returned to Brazil. In 1963, when I went to Texas to read a twenty-minute paper on contemporary Brazilian literature, I made a telephone call to Washington where she now lives. She almost swooned with pleasure. She now speaks Portuguese with an American accent. 'You *must* come and see me!' she pleaded. I explained that I could not afford to make such a long journey. But she insisted: 'I'll pay your fare!' Naturally, I did not accept. Besides, there was not enough time.

Then I had a maid whose name I cannot disclose for obvious reasons. She was having psychoanalysis. That is the honest truth. Twice a week she consulted a psychoanalyst, a woman called Neide. Whenever the maid felt stress coming on, she would telephone for help. To begin with, she never admitted that she was being psychoanalysed but made other excuses. Until one day she informed me that Doctor Neide felt sure I would understand and that I should be told the truth. I did my best to be understanding but there came a point when I could stand it no longer. Whenever she was feeling unwell, which was all too often, she would become truculent and rebellious. Then she would come to her senses and beg to be forgiven. She could only work if her transistor radio was playing loudly and she would sing along with the music in a high-pitched voice. If I showed any irritation or asked her to make less noise, she would immediately turn up the volume and sing all the louder. I put up with it until I could take no more. I dismissed her as tactfully as possible. A week later she rang me to unburden her worries: she could not get another job because, when she told prospective employers she was having psychoanalysis, they become alarmed and lost interest. Since she was alone in Rio, she had nowhere to go and had been sleeping out in the cold on benches. I felt I was to blame. But it was no good: I am not a psychoanalyst and there was little I could do to help anyone so seriously ill. I consoled myself with the thought that she was being treated by Doctor Neide, a kind-hearted woman whom I rang up to see what could be done. The most annoying thing about this maid

was not her moodiness but her voice. I am extremely sensitive as far as voices are concerned, and if I had been obliged to listen to that hysterical screeching for much longer I myself would have finished up on Doctor Neide's couch.

SOMETHING

I saw something. Something real. It was ten o'clock at night in Tiradentes Square and the taxi was speeding along. Then I saw a street I shall never forget. I am not going to describe it: it is mine. All I can say is that the street was deserted and it was ten o'clock at night. Nothing more. But somehow I began to blossom.

PIANO LESSONS

My father was keen that his three daughters should study music. The instrument of his choice was the piano, bought with enormous sacrifice. Father engaged a teacher who could not have been fatter. She was positively obese, except for her hands which were tiny. She was called Dona Pupu and the name was most apt. For me, those piano lessons were sheer torture. I only enjoyed two things about them. One was a dusty acacia-tree in a private garden which I used to look out for as the tram went round a bend in the road. And as the tree came into sight I felt so excited. The other thing was making up tunes. I preferred inventing things to studying. I was nine years old and my mother was dead. Even after all these years I can still play one of those tunes using two fingers. Why should this date from the year my mother died? The melody is divided into two parts: the first part is gentle, the second fierce and almost martial, perhaps expressing my rebellion. Whenever Dona Pupu decided to play Chopin I always felt quite sick, yet Chopin is one of my favourite composers. But I never got sick of the sweets she handed me as she sat there chewing to her heart's content. I was so lazy when it came to practising that I used to ask one of my sisters to play the high notes while I played the middle and the lower notes. And I was fortunate: just imagine if my father had wanted me to study the piano. I could also play by ear. But one of my sisters had a real gift for music. She progressed from Dona Pupu to Maestro Ernâni Braga who taught at the Conservatory in Recife. And he asked her if she would like to become a professional

pianist. For some obscure reason she refused. In the evenings, my father would ask us to play for him. I remember one evening he had been dozing in his chair when he suddenly woke up to the sound of music on the radio. Deeply moved, he asked what was being played. It was a Beethoven sonata. One of my sisters still possesses one of Dona Pupu's gifts: a china doll padded with satin which also serves as a pin-cushion. In our family, she is the one who likes to keep things. I often ask her to look after some of my possessions. The only souvenir I have kept of Dona Pupu are some yellow flowers from the acacia tree. I wonder who lived in that house? That was of more interest to me than my piano lessons. How my thoughts would stray. My mind was always on something else. Sometimes I would even think about Dona Pupu herself. How could anyone so fat have such delicate little hands? How they darted to and fro over the keyboard. She must be dead by now. And what an enormous coffin must have been needed to bury her corpse. She was married. Something I found incredible. In my innocence, this was probably one of the problems which distracted me most when I should have been concentrating on the music. I also remember the steps leading to the front door of Dona Pupu's house where I used to play before having my lesson. But I can think of nothing else of any interest. Like my sister, I also went on to have lessons with Ernâni Braga who commented on my delicate fingers. I shall say no more: he died some time ago. Besides, my fingers are no longer delicate. I possess a certain strength, of that I am convinced. And that strength comes from these soft, weak fingers of mine.

PEP PILLS

I am not a great believer in pep pills. I prefer to be alert without taking pills. I was once invited to a party where people would almost certainly be using drugs and smoking marihuana. A clear mind is something I hold precious. So I turned down the invitation. Friends insisted, assuring me that although I did not know any of the other guests, everyone was anxious to meet me. All the worse for me. I am not public property. And I have no desire to be stared at. All I craved was peace and quiet. Maria Betânia telephoned me, wishing to make my acquaintance. Do I know her? *Friends tell me you're most charming.* I must think about

this. *They tell me you bare your soul when you write.* Do I really? I want none of this. I prefer to remain anonymous and guard my privacy. I want to express myself without speaking, if possible. Maria Betânia knows me from my books. My articles in the *Jornal do Brasil* are bringing me fame. Readers send me roses. One day I shall stop writing. In order to become myself. Why do I write in this way? Believe me, there is nothing dangerous about me. And I do have men and women friends. Not to mention my sisters to whom I am now closer than ever. I feel very close to the people around me which is good in one sense, in another bad. I feel such a need for silence. I was always so quiet. And now I can express myself without even speaking. But there is something missing. And I intend to achieve it. It is that kind of freedom which requires no one's permission.

GOD'S SWEET WAYS

You have probably already forgotten about my maid Aninha, that quiet little woman from Minas who wanted to read one of my books, no matter how complicated, because she could not stomach 'sugared water'. And you will almost certainly have forgotten that for some strange reason I used to call her Aparecida, whereupon she suggested: 'Perhaps it's because I just appeared from nowhere.' What I may have forgotten to mention is that you really had to like her in order to accept her as a person.

You may have forgotten her. I could never forget her. Neither her muffled voice, nor those false front teeth which she would wear to please me although she did not really need them. Not that they could be seen because she scarcely moved her lips and even her smile seemed to turn inwards. I also forgot to mention that Aninha was downright ugly.

One morning she went out shopping and did not come back for ages. When she finally reappeared she was smiling inanely to herself, as if she were toothless and all gums. The money I had given her to do the shopping was crumpled up in her right hand and the shopping bag was hanging from her left wrist.

There was something different about her appearance. But it was difficult to tell what it could be. She seemed even sweeter than usual. And a little more 'conspicuous', as if she had made some progress. This change in her appearance made us ask suspiciously: 'What about the shopping?' She replied: 'I had no money.' Taken aback we showed her the money in her hand. Gazing at it, all she could say was: 'Oh!' Something else about her strange behaviour made us look inside the shopping bag. It was full of milk bottle tops and other stoppers, along with scraps of dirty paper.

Then she said: 'I must lie down for I have the most awful pain right here' – and as if she were a tiny child she pointed to the crown of her head. She was not complaining, simply telling us. She stayed in bed for hours without saying a word. Having assured me that she did not like 'childish' books, Aninha now looked as innocent as any child. If we tried to question her, she would simply answer that she could not get up.

Before I knew what was happening, our clairvoyant cook, Jandira, had already called an ambulance, having decided that Aninha was quite mad. I went to see for myself. She lay there silent and mad. And I never saw such a sweet expression.

I explained to the cook that she should have asked for the emergency service run by the local Psychiatric Unit. Feeling rather stunned, I automatically rang the Pinel Institute myself. I also felt a curious sweetness inside me, which I cannot explain. Well, perhaps I can. That sweetness was my great love for Aninha.

In the meantime, the ambulance had arrived from the hospital. Sitting up in bed, she allowed the doctor to examine her. He could find nothing clinically wrong with her. Then he began to question Aninha: Why had she collected all those milk-bottle tops and scraps of paper? She replied in a quiet voice: to decorate my room. He asked her several other questions. Ugly, mad and gentle, Aninha patiently gave all the right answers as if she had prepared them beforehand. I told the doctor I had already called an ambulance from a Psychiatric Unit. He assured me: 'Just as well. This is a psychiatric case if ever there was one.'

We waited for the other ambulance to arrive, sitting there in bewilderment, silent and pensive. The ambulance arrived. The psychiatrist lost no time in making his diagnosis. The wards were full and she would have to be treated as an out-patient. But Aninha had no one to look after her. So I telephoned a doctor friend who contacted a colleague at the Pinel Institute where they agreed to admit her until my friend could examine her for himself. 'Are you a writer?' – asked the doctor, who turned out to be a distinguished academic, I began mumbling: 'I...' when he interrupted: 'It's just that your face is familiar and your friend mentioned your first name on the telephone.' In such a situation I could scarcely remember my own name, but unperturbed he went on to say, all friendly and gushing and showing greater interest in me than in poor Aninha: 'Well I never, how delightful to meet you in person.' Sounding foolish and insincere, all I could think of to say was: 'I'm pleased to meet you, too.'

Then Aninha was carted off, that sweet, gentle creature from Minas, wearing her dazzling false teeth, more or less aware of what was happening. Only part of her was conscious: that part which can cause us pain. In short, my doctor friend examined her and diagnosed her condition as being extremely serious. She was admitted at once.

I spent that night in my sitting-room, smoking one cigarette after another until first light. The entire house seemed to be impregnated with an unnerving sweetness which only Aninha could have left behind.

Dear Aninha, how I miss you and the clumsy way you moved around the house. I shall write to your mother in Minas and tell her to come and fetch you. Who knows what will become of you? The one thing I do know is that you will go on being sweet and mad for the rest of your life, with the odd moment of lucidity. Of course you can use milk-bottle tops to decorate a room. And why not rescue crumpled bits of paper for the same purpose? She could not stomach 'sugared water' and the water she had to drink was anything but sugared. This world is anything but sugared. That was something I discovered as I sat up that night, aggressively smoking one cigarette after another. Oh, the aggression with which I smoked! At times I was overcome with rage, followed by fear, then resignation. God's sweetness can be very depressing. Can it be good for one to be as sweet as this?

Someone had given Aninha a red patterned skirt which was much too long for her. When she had a day off work, she would wear this skirt with a brown blouse. That was another sweet thing about Aninha. She had no taste whatsoever.

– You ought to get yourself a boyfriend, Aninha.

– I had one.

How come? What man could ever have fallen in love with her, for God's sake? There is the answer: he did it for God's sake.

MORE SWEETNESS FROM GOD

I had written about Aninha soon after she became ill. Time passed and, lo and behold, she turned up on my doorstep. For a fraction of a second I took fright, but I soon realized she was better. She herself had remembered our names and address and had asked to be allowed to come and collect the money we owed her. She has not yet been discharged from the Psychiatric Unit but they allow her to go out on trial. Aninha looks prettier now, having put on some weight with all those injections, and she has been given electric shock treatment three times. She saw a big difference in the children who are now much taller and she almost moved me to tears when she asked: 'Is Madam still writing?' I gave Aninha her money and our outspoken, clairvoyant

cook told her: 'Count it and let's see if you can still add up.' Aninha counted the money correctly and even noticed that I had paid her for the whole of the month. She was most grateful. She now says she wants to find herself a boyfriend and is even prepared to appear on a television programme which matches couples for marriage. At the hospital they soon discovered Aninha's domestic skills and as soon as she is discharged, she will go on working there indefinitely. We all felt so happy for her.

THE CASE OF THE GOLD FOUNTAIN-PEN

I am going to call this *the case of the gold fountain-pen*. To tell the truth, there is no mystery. But nothing could please me more than to write something with at least a title reminiscent of Agatha Christie.

Some friends thought it would be a nice idea to make me a present of a gold fountain-pen. I had always written with a ballpoint pen or used a typewriter. But now that I possessed a gold pen, why not use it? It looks elegant and is of excellent quality. But then I came up against a problem I could not ignore. This was my problem: are the words written with a gold pen also made of gold? Would I be obliged to write more elaborate sentences because my implement was so much more precious? And would I end up writing in a completely different style? And if my style were to change, surely that would have the effect of changing me as well. But in what way? For the better? And there was another problem: what would happen if I were to find, like King Midas, that everything I wrote with my gold pen turned out to have the brilliance and unyielding hardness of gold?

As I said before, I did not pay too much attention to these little problems; thinking is not something I consider dangerous. And I can think without allowing it to upset me.

There was, however, a more serious problem to come. I had only been given one gold pen and I have two little boys. But I am racing ahead. Let me start at the beginning.

When my younger son saw the gold pen, his whole expression changed at once. After carefully examining the pen, he did not utter a word. But desire was written all over his face. The desire to possess something beautiful. His eyes shone in silence. I understood. He wanted the gold pen. It was quite obvious.

So I took the initiative: 'I know what you're thinking. You're wondering how you can get your hands on my pen.' He said nothing, torn between desire and remorse. He overcame his guilt and suggested without much enthusiasm: 'You could have your name engraved on the pen before using it.' I told him: 'If I were to do that, then you would have to use a pen with someone else's name engraved on it.' Silence. Deep reflection. Then he replied

despondently: 'That's true, but if I use it right away, someone might steal it from me or I could lose it.' He was right. So we both started to think hard. My efforts paid off. I came up with an idea. 'Listen, I'll give you the pen when you finish high school. By then you will be grown-up, no one will try to steal it from you, and you yourself will know how to look after your things.' 'I suppose so.' But he was still feeling remorseful, as if he were depriving me of a pen which rightfully belonged to me. Little did he know how much I enjoy seeing people take things away from me.

By the following day, any traces of guilt had vanished.

I could not find a pencil to write down a message and decided to use the gold pen. Just then my son walked into the room and caught me in the act. 'No, that's not fair!' he complained resentfully. 'Why not?' I asked. 'Surely you don't mind me using the pen now and then!' 'But you'll spoil the nib. Look, you've scratched it already!' He was right: one day the pen would be his and I should have taken more care. So I showed him where I intended to keep it and promised I would not use the pen any more.

But I have two little sons. And I could not understand why the older boy had shown no interest. This saddened me. I would have preferred to see them quarrel over the gold pen rather than have one of them show no interest whatsoever.

I waited until we were alone. I then told him the whole story and concluded by saying: 'If you had asked me first, I should have given the pen to you.' 'But I didn't even know you had a gold pen.' 'Then you should have known, you go around with your head in the clouds and pay no attention to other people's conversations.' Silence. I asked helpfully: 'But had you known that I had been given a gold pen, would you have wanted it?' 'No.' 'Why not?' 'Because gold pens cost a lot of money.' 'So you don't think you should be given anything that costs a lot of money?' 'You've had other things which cost a lot and I never asked you for them.' 'Whyever not?' 'Because they belonged to you.' 'That wouldn't have bothered me.'

We remained there in silence, not knowing what to say to each other.

Finally he decided to settle the matter once and for all and told me: 'I couldn't care less. So long as the pen writes, any old pen does me.'

No one could disagree, but I was far from satisfied. There was

something about this conversation which was not quite right. I should have preferred to have been... well, who knows... how can I put it... I did not feel the least bit pleased, his answers upset me and I can say no more.

Suddenly, I discovered what was wrong. The gold pen did not really matter. What did matter was that one son had wanted it and the other did not. I pursued the conversation: 'Come here, tell me why you don't ask me for things.'

His reply was swift and bruising: 'I'm always asking for things and you always say no.'

The cruelty of this accusation left me dismayed. Besides, it simply was not true. That made his accusation all the more serious. The child had been bearing so deep a grudge that he had transformed it into this terrible lie.

'What are these things you asked for which I wouldn't give you?' 'When I was little, I asked for one of those round things you blow up to float in the water.' 'And didn't I buy you one?' 'No, you didn't.' 'Would you still like one?' 'No, I don't need it any more.' 'I'm sorry I didn't buy you one.' He took pity on me: 'You don't even remember. You wouldn't buy me one because you said they were dangerous, that the thing would start floating on the waves and carry me out to sea, and that I was far too little and couldn't swim.' 'Now I remember.' But the sadness had still lingered.

The fountain pen had taken us far. I thought it wise to call a halt. So we said no more. Sometimes there is little to be gained by probing things too deeply.

A PLEASANT INTERVIEW

Not so very long ago a girl telephoned me from my publishers requesting an interview which was to appear in a series entitled: *Bedside Reading for Women*. I loathe interviews: questions inhibit me and it takes me ages to think of the right answers. Besides, I know that the interviewer will inevitably distort every word I say. But the request had come from my publishers and I could scarcely refuse. I arranged a date. And then I began to feel very annoyed even with my publishers. What about? *Bedside Reading for Women* is selling like hot cakes and the series is making a fortune. The girl who does the interviews gets paid. And I am the one who has to do the work. I tried to telephone my publisher and cancel the interview. But it was hopeless. Like everyone else in this city, I am at the mercy of the telephone. I could not get a line, and when I did there was no connection. I finally gave up. But I shall take my revenge, I thought to myself: Somehow or other, I shall take my revenge.

Except that I had neither the strength nor the inclination. At the appointed hour, a most attractive and delightful girl walks through the door. Her name is Cristina. She has delicate features which cannot easily be described because what really matters are her inner traits of character and their expression. We took to each other immediately. Which led her to confide that she, too, worked for a newspaper and when her colleagues at work heard that she was going to interview me, they commiserated with her. They assured her I was a *holy terror* who would hardly speak to anyone. Then Cristina added: 'But you are speaking.'

Yes, I was speaking – how could I resist speaking? The light was already waning and, in order to get close to the two candles I had lit, Cristina was squatting on the rug and already very much at home.

Her questions were intelligent and complicated, and mostly about literature. I told her: 'I thought your middle-class readers would be more interested in knowing whether I like traditional Brazilian fare such as black beans and stewed meat served with rice.' Unperturbed, Cristina replied: 'We'll come to that later. The interview has barely started.'

I found Cristina enchanting. She's engaged to be married. What a pity, I thought to myself. How I should like to have kept her sitting there until my sons grew up so that one of them might marry her. But she cannot wait and my sons have some way to go before they become adults. I must resign myself to extolling her virtues as an interviewer.

The interview opened on a humorous note. We had several laughs. Once when she asked me what I thought about Fausto Cunha's statement – something which had escaped my attention – that Guimarães Rosa and I were nothing but a couple of frauds. Amused and delighted, I burst out laughing. I told her: 'I didn't see that, but I can assure you there is nothing fraudulent about either of us. People might call us lots of things, but never frauds.' How could you, Fausto Cunha! You of all people! And to think I found you charming when we met at Marly de Oliveira's wedding reception. I cannot believe you were being serious. And I am sure even Guimarães Rosa would have a good laugh at your remark.

Cristina asked me if I supported Left-wing politics. I confessed that I would like to see a Socialist government in Brazil. Not some imitation based on Socialism in England, but a government adapted to life in Brazil.

She asked me if I preferred to think of myself as a Brazilian writer or as a woman writer who happened to live in Brazil. In reply I pointed out that no matter how feminine a woman might be, she is not a woman writer but simply a writer. Writers have no sex, or rather, they have both sexes, in different degrees needless to say. I explained that I simply thought of myself as being a writer and by no means a typically Brazilian writer. Cristina argued: could that be true of Guimarães Rosa whose language is so unmistakably Brazilian? I insisted: even of Guimarães Rosa, for here is a writer whose work can be appreciated in any country.

Cristina had a bad cold and so had I: one more trait in common. The interview was constantly interrupted by fits of coughing which also helped to dispel any sense of formality. Neither of us was taking anything for our cough, and for the same reason: we were both much too lazy.

I took my revenge by interviewing Cristina in turn. I asked her several questions to which she gave straightforward answers. Under the pretext of showing her the portraits various artists had done of me, I took her through nearly every room in the

apartment. Cristina was my sort of person and had the right to get to know me through my surroundings. One's home can be so revealing. She entered the bedroom where one of my sons was lying in bed reading by candle-light. He was not in the least disturbed by Cristina's presence. My other son was going to the cinema with a friend. And although he is at an age where he likes to show that he is no longer tied to his mother's apron-strings, he kissed me goodbye in front of Cristina without any embarrassment. The younger boy thought nothing of interrupting us to ask for money to buy his weekly magazine. I felt so much at ease in Cristina's company that I put my legs up on the coffee-table and slid so far down on the sofa that I was almost lying on my back.

Cristina, you have all the best qualities of Brazilian youth. It makes one feel proud. I should like my children to turn out like you one day.

Which reminds me of another question she raised: what mattered most to me – being a mother or a writer? The easiest way to find out was to ask myself: if I were to choose between the two, which would I choose? The answer was simple: I would give up writing. I certainly think it more important to be a mother than a writer.

Cristina remarked: 'Crime does not pay. Does literature?' Not at all. Writing is one of the surest ways of going bankrupt. Cristina expressed surprise and asked me why I kept on writing. And I could not give her an answer.

Ironically, she came so well prepared for the interview that she knew more about me than I know myself. She asked me why my women characters are better defined than those of the men. I did not entirely agree. I have a male character who dominates an entire book and who could scarcely be more masculine.

Perhaps one day I shall interview you, Cristina. Boys at University will identify with you and nearly all of them will dream of marrying you. Your boyfriend had better watch out. I also have a friend who would fall romantically in love with you should you ever meet. Brazil needs you. If only there were more young men and women like you, Brazil would soon make progress.

I can see that I am taking my revenge after all: Cristina is writing about me and here am I writing about her. By the way, Cristina, would you like to come and have dinner with us one evening? Just give me a call. You will soon be married to a diplomat

but there will be no formality when you dine here. We shall probably eat in the kitchen, for I keep forgetting to buy a little bell to summon the maid which rules out eating in the dining-room. A good friend of mine, who is extremely generous but forgetful, told me she has several bells at home and promised to give me one. Where is it? Well, I keep forgetting to buy a bell and she keeps forgetting to bring me one.

Cristina also asked me what I thought about 'literature of commitment'. I thought it perfectly valid. She wanted to know if I would be prepared to devote my own writing to some political cause. Frankly, I see myself as being committed. Everything I write relates, at least deep down inside me, to the reality around us. Perhaps this aspect of my writing will become more forceful one day. Perhaps not. It is difficult to know. I am not even sure if I shall go on writing. In all probability, I shall give it up.

Cristina then asked me what I thought about popular culture. I told her that there is still no such thing as popular culture in Brazil. She wanted to know if I considered it important. I said that I did, but not nearly as important as providing food for people who are starving. Unless popular culture can make people aware that they have a right to demand food when they are hungry. Read the latest Papal Encyclical which defends armed rebellion as a last resort against dictatorship.

So long, Cristina, until you come to dinner. I got the impression you liked me too. That makes me feel good. Yet somehow, after reading your article, I thought I sounded rather banal. I have never thought of myself as being banal. And my eyes are not blue.

1968

SAN TIAGO

A lucid mind does not necessarily imply a lack of feeling. Take San Tiago Dantas, for example, who was often accused of being cold and unemotional. But even Schmidt could be ambivalent on this matter.

I met San Tiago in Paris. We immediately made up a party and decided that same night to tour the night-clubs of Paris. Which we did until dawn. Whenever the violins became too strident or were played too close to our table for comfort, we left. But when people tour the night-clubs, they inevitably drink. And I am hopeless when it comes to drinking. Too much alcohol either sends me to sleep or makes me weepy. And I do not know which is worse. This particular night, I kept dozing off and shedding tears. If San Tiago was one for crying, he showed no signs of it. But his lucidity was really a question of enormous self-control rather than a lack of feeling.

Ah, how many potential corpses were in our party. Schmidt, Bluma, Wainer, San Tiago. No one knew. Or did we? So much so, that we could not bear the strident music coming from those wailing violins.

There was one night-club proprietress who also acted as cashier. Her bare shoulders were heavy and curvaceous. We began discussing shoulders. Mine were delicate. What did I have to drink that night? Whatever the others ordered for me and that was quite a mixture.

We drank until dawn and the first glimmer of daylight. No one felt like going to bed but it was time to go home. We started walking. And San Tiago ran into the first of the flower-sellers as they arrived from the market to set up their stalls. I could not count the dozens of roses he bought for me. I staggered along the pavement barely able to carry them and, as I went, roses kept scattering on to the pavement. If ever I felt beautiful to behold, it was that morning in Paris with roses cascading from my arms. And no man who showers a woman with roses could ever be accused of being lucid but insensitive.

My hotel room was filled with the glorious perfume of roses. And I succumbed to death rather than sleep.

I woke up at midday and could barely open my eyes I had such a hangover. I roused my husband and asked him to order some really strong, black coffee.

The waiter appeared almost immediately. But not just with the coffee. He delivered bunches of flowers sent by San Tiago. And as I was drinking my coffee, the telephone rang: it was San Tiago anxious to know how I was feeling. I was feeling awful. He asked if we could meet for lunch. But at this point memory fails me. I think we had a train to catch to Berne which made it impossible to accept his invitation.

When did I see San Tiago again? In Rio. We were invited to dine with him and his wife Edméia. He found me much changed. I would have nothing to drink. I neither wept nor shone. I said very little all evening. San Tiago asked me if I was feeling sad. I told him that was *it*.

During dinner, the conversation turned to a certain painting in an Italian museum. San Tiago asked me what I thought of it. I confessed I could not recall the painting. Whereupon he remarked with the utmost sincerity: 'Obviously you are one of those people who only remember what happened to them at the age of ten.'

The years passed. Whenever San Tiago visited Washington he always telephoned the moment he arrived, giving me a pleasant surprise. When he came to dinner, we would sit up chatting well into the night. And I learned so much from him. Precisely what I learned I have since forgotten, yet I somehow feel that knowledge has stayed with me.

We once had dinner together at a Washington hotel. And we discussed politics. I felt uneasy. As a rule, men do not discuss politics with women. Could I be losing my femininity? I asked him outright. He assured me nothing could be further from the truth and I ought to watch out. Reassured, I settled down to enjoy my dinner.

Many years later he became seriously ill. One day I received a formal invitation to a banquet at which San Tiago was to make a political speech. The invitation could only have come from San Tiago himself. I decided to accept. After dinner, San Tiago rose to his feet clutching his notes. His voice faltered. He took a sip of water. Then resumed his speech like a hero conquering himself. For every true hero conquers himself. He who overcomes, overcomes himself.

When he had finished, I went up to embrace him, fighting

back my tears. I was embracing a corpse. A lucid corpse. He resigned himself to death, of that I am certain.

I forgot to mention that San Tiago had various nieces whom he loved dearly. When his favourite niece paid a visit to Washington, she contacted me with a letter of introduction, asking me to invite her for a little chat. We had several little chats. She often came to dinner and soon became one of the family.

Once back in Rio, I received an invitation to her wedding. Both bride and groom looked shy and radiant. I sat in one of the pews. I looked across at San Tiago. A seated corpse. The ceremony took place.

As the wedding guests rose to their feet to congratulate the happy couple, I came face to face with San Tiago. He could now hardly speak. With great effort, he asked me if I was still writing. I told him I had just finished a book called *The Passion According to G.H.* He said he liked the title.

I know he would also have liked the book. But he died before it was published. I did not attend the funeral. Because not everyone dies.

HUMAN WARMTH

No, no it was not red. It was almost night and the sky was still clear. If only it were as red to the eye as it was intrinsically. This was the static warmth of light without any colour. No, the woman could not perspire. She was dry and transparent. And outside, only birds with stuffed wings were flying about. Yet the heat was visible. If she closed her eyes to avoid seeing the heat, hallucination gradually took over, reminding her of its presence: she could see huge elephants approaching, sweet plodding elephants with parched hide, the flesh inside moistened by the intolerable warmth of tenderness; they had difficulty in carrying their own weight and this made them slow and ponderous.

It was still too early to light the lamps, which at least would hasten nightfall. Impossible night which refused to come, to come, to come. And her impossible love now as dry as the fever of someone who cannot perspire – a love without opium or morphine. And 'I love you' was a splinter which could not be removed with pincers. A splinter embedded in the thickest part of the sole.

And this awful lack of thirst. Heat with thirst would be bearable. But oh, this lack of thirst. Everything one might have expected was missing. There was not even any will. Nothing but splinters no pincers could remove. Only her teeth were moist. Inside that voracious, parched mouth her teeth were moist but hard – and above all, a mouth craving nothingness. And nothingness was warm on that perpetual evening.

Her open eyes shining like diamonds. Thirsty sparrows on the roof-tops. 'Fellow humans, I love you,' was an impossible expression. She saw humanity as an eternal death still awaiting the respite of finally dying. Nothing, nothing was dying on that arid evening, nothing was rotting. And at six o'clock in the evening it was midday. It was midday with the cautious sound of a water-pump, a pump which had been operating for so long without water that it had turned into rusty iron. For two days, the city had been without water. Nothing had ever been as alert as that body, no sign of perspiration, her eyes shining, all vibrations at a halt. And God? No. Not even anguish. Her breast empty, no

sign of contraction. Not as much as a sigh.

Meanwhile this was summer. Summer extending like a deserted playground during the school holidays. Suffering? None whatsoever. No hint of tears or sweat. No salt. Nothing except a heavy sweetness: like that of lumbering elephants with dried-out hides. Transparent and warm emaciation. Should she think about her man? No, a splinter in the sole of her foot. Her children? Fifteen children suspended in mid-air and motionless in the absence of any wind. And supposing her hands were to start becoming moist? Even had there been water, she would not have bathed, out of hatred. Not a trickle anywhere. Crisis is something at a standstill. It is a precious diamond. The hoarse cicada did not interrupt its chirping. And suppose God were finally to melt into rain? No. That is not what I want. Out of dry and tranquil hatred, this is what I really want, this silence formed by heat which the rustic cicada can make one feel. Feel? One feels nothing. Except this desperate need for soothing opium. I want this intolerable thing to continue because I crave eternity. I want this constant waiting like the cicada's impassioned song, for all this is arrested death, eternity, sexual arousal without any desire, dogs without any bark. This is when good and evil cease to exist. Suddenly we are pardoned, we who nourish ourselves on chastisement. There is now the indifference of being pardoned. There is no longer any judgment. This is not the pardon granted after judgment. Both judge and culprit are missing. And death, which was to come once and for all, just goes on and on, without stopping. It is not raining, it is not raining. There is no menstruation. My ovaries are two shrivelled pearls. I shall tell you frankly: out of dry hatred, this is what I really want, that there should be no rain.

Just at this moment she hears something. Something which is also dry and makes her even drier as she listens attentively. It is the rumbling of dry thunder, without any saliva, rumbling, but where? In the bluest of skies, not as much as a cloud of love. The thunder must be in the distance. But there is also the sickly stench of large elephants and of jasmine from the house next door. India invading with its perfumed women. The smell of carnations in a cemetery. Will everything suddenly change? For anyone who has never experienced night or rain or the rotting of damp wood – for anyone who has never possessed anything except pearls, night is about to fall, wood is about to rot at last, carnations on tombstones will revive in the rain. Rain coming

from Malaysia? Nothing has stirred, yet there is already a tremor within. The woman is unaware that the tremor is hers, just as she was unaware that what was scorching her was not the heat of the afternoon but her own human warmth. All she perceives is that something is now about to change, that it will rain or night will fall. But she cannot stand this waiting and, before the rain can fall, the sparkle in her eyes dissolves into tears. And the sky at last grows mellow.

ACCURSED AND BLISSFUL INSOMNIA

Suddenly my eyes are wide open. And total darkness everywhere. It must be the middle of the night. I switch on the lamp at my bedside and alas, it is only two a.m. My mind is clear and lucid. Perhaps I will think of someone who can be telephoned at two a.m. without cursing me. But who? Whom do I know who suffers from insomnia? The hours seem endless. I get out of bed and prepare some coffee. And to add to my troubles, I have to drink it with one of those horrid artificial sweeteners because my dietician thinks I ought to lose the four kilos I gained in hospital after getting badly burned in a fire in my apartment. And what does one do in that sitting-room with the light switched on? One thinks of bright darkness. No, no, one does not think. One feels. One feels something which has only one name: solitude. Will I read? Never. Write? Never. Time passes, I look at the clock, perhaps it is five. Not even four. Who could be awake at this hour? And I cannot even ask anyone to telephone me in the middle of the night for I myself might be asleep and then I should never forgive them. Would a sleeping-pill help? Am I becoming addicted? No one would forgive addiction. So I remain there, sitting and feeling. Feeling what? Nothingness. And the telephone within reach.

But insomnia is often a gift. To wake up suddenly in the middle of the night and feel this rare thing: solitude. Scarcely a sound to be heard. Only the sea waves beating against the shore. And I drink my coffee with pleasure, all alone in the world. No one interrupts this void. A void so empty and yet so rich. And the telephone silent. No sudden ringing to give one a fright. Then the first glimmer of light. The clouds lighten beneath the sun, sometimes pale as the moon, sometimes burning like fire. I go onto the terrace, probably the first person that morning to contemplate the sea's white spume. The sea is mine, the sun is mine, the earth is mine. And I feel happy for nothing and everything. Until the house awakens like sunrise and I am reunited with my sleepy children.

WORDS OF GRATITUDE TO MY TYPEWRITER

My Olympia typewriter is portable and light enough to indulge this strange habit of mine of using it on my lap. My typewriter works beautifully, runs smoothly. It transmits what I have to say without my becoming involved in the muddle of my own handwriting. In a manner of speaking, the typewriter provokes thoughts and feelings. And it helps me as if it were human. Without my feeling I am being mechanized simply because I use a typewriter. Besides, it seems to be quite capable of capturing nuances. And, thanks to my typewriter, everything I write comes out already printed and somehow makes me more objective. The low sound of tapping keys quietly accompanies the solitude of the person who is writing. I should love to give my typewriter a present. But what is one to give an object which humbly remains an object, without even aspiring to become a human being? I find this common habit of praising people because they are 'so human' rather tiresome. The word 'human' is usually meant to imply 'good-natured', 'affable', even 'sweet'. And the typewriter has none of these qualities. It does not show the slightest inclination to turn into a robot. It is quite happy to do its job. Which makes me happy, too.

THE UNREALITY OF REALISM

Here is a summary of the questions raised by Struthers Burt in an essay about the unreality of realism. As a novelist, he asked himself:

Is there such a thing as realism in writing or in any other art form and is realism possible in art? Is the word 'realism' in itself not something of a contradiction when applied to any art, to any form of human expression which is conscious and self-controlled? One might also say that this word is contradictory even when applied to what are presumably factual descriptions in a newspaper column or report. What is art? Could it be human expression, conscious, self-controlled and directed in all its myriad manifestations, on a higher or lower plane, animated or quiescent, valuable or futile, lasting or ephemeral? And what is realism?

That is a big question, for what we are really asking is what is life? And once we have decided – if such a thing is possible –

we start asking ourselves another big question. What is the relationship between art and life? What is the connection? The umbilical cord? And why does art draw upon life? and almost simultaneously? and inevitably? Because historians and anthropologists have clearly shown and confirmed that man no sooner comes into existence than he begins to manifest an urge to express himself artistically. Man has never been satisfied with things as they are and he soon began to mould them in his own crude way. After a while – within the comparatively small space of several hundreds of thousands or millions of years – he became quite skilled and began painting walls and carving intricate designs on bones.

GENTLE AS A FAWN

Her name was Eremita. She was nineteen years old. A trusting face, some pimples. Where was the attraction? Yet there was something attractive about that body which was neither ugly nor beautiful, in that face where a sweetness craving greater sweetnesses brought a sign of life.

Beauty is perhaps the wrong word. There probably was no beauty there although certain indefinable traits attracted like water. There was certainly living substance; nails, flesh, teeth, a mixture of resilience and weakness, constituting a vague presence which could suddenly materialize in the form of a questioning head ready to do one's bidding the moment you uttered the name: Eremita. Her brown eyes were indescribable and bore no relation to the rest of her face. As independent as if they had been planted in the flesh of an arm from where they could watch us – open and moist. Her whole being was of a sweetness close to tears.

Sometimes she would reply with the rudeness typical of maids. She explained that she had always been like that, even as a child. Yet it had nothing to do with her character. There was nothing hard about her, there was no suggestion of any perceptible law. 'I was afraid,' she would say quite naturally. 'Boy, was I hungry!' she would exclaim, and for some strange reason there was never any more to be said. 'He has a lot of respect for me,' she would say, referring to her boyfriend and, despite the cliché, anyone listening to her entered a delicate world of animals and birds, where all creatures respected each other. 'I feel so ashamed,' she would say, and then smile, enshrouded in her own shadows. If she hungered after bread – which she would quickly devour as if someone might snatch it away from her – it was thunder she feared, and having to speak which made her embarrassed. She was kind and honest. 'God forbid,' she would mutter, distracted.

For she had moments of distraction. Her face took on a smooth mask of impassive sadness. A sadness more ancient than her nature. Her eyes became vacant; one might even say a little cold. Anyone near her suffered without being able to help. All one could do was to wait.

For this strange infanta had succumbed to something. No one would dare to touch her at such a moment. One could only wait, solemnly watching over her with bated breath. All one could do was to hope that the danger might pass. Until with an unhurried gesture, almost like a sigh, she would awaken like a newborn fawn struggling to its feet. She had returned from her repose in sadness.

She was returning, perhaps no richer, but certainly more reassured after having drunk from who knows what fountain. But a fountain which must have been ancient and pure. Yes, she had hidden depths. Although nothing could be discovered simply by exploring those depths – profundity itself had to be explored, just as one discovers shadows in darkness. It is possible that if someone were to travel further, to cover leagues in the dark, they might find some trail, guided perhaps by the fluttering of wings, by an animal's tracks. Then – all of a sudden – the forest.

So that was her mystery: she had discovered a short cut into the forest. That was almost certainly where she vanished in her moments of distraction. Only to return, her eyes filled with sweetness and ignorance. Her eyes brimming with tears. An ignorance so vast that it could absorb all the wisdom of this world.

That was Eremita. Had she surfaced with everything she found in the forest, she would have gone up in flames. But what she had seen – the roots she had bitten into, the thorns which had drawn blood, the water in which she had bathed her feet, the golden darkness which had enfolded her in its light – none of this she could describe: it had been seen at a glance, and in great haste. So the mystery remained intact.

When she emerged, she was a housemaid once more. Who was constantly being summoned from the darkness of that shortcut to more servile tasks – to wash clothes, to mop the floor, to serve this one and that one.

But was she really serving? For anyone looking closely would have noticed that she washed clothes in the sun; that she mopped the floor – drenched by the rain; that she hung the sheets – out in the wind. She took care to serve from a much greater distance, and to serve other gods. Always with that integrity she had brought from the forest. Without thinking: simply a body, quietly going about her chores, her face radiating a gentle hope which can neither be given nor taken away.

The only trace of the danger she had faced was her furtive

way of eating bread. In everything else she remained serene. Even when she stole money which had been left lying on the table or slipped the odd parcel of food to her boyfriend. For she had also mastered the art of petty theft during her excursions into the forest.

ANXIOUS TO LEARN

Why, dear God, am I unable to pray? How am I to live without prayer? Not just to ask for myself and others, but to give thanks, to give thanks, and somehow enter a convent, yes me, so full of wrath and fury.

There is a fortune-teller who knew me as a little girl. And now she calls on me and charges nothing. Despite being a fortune-teller, she is a fervent Roman Catholic. And she has been to Mass to pray for me. Thank you for saying those prayers of which I am incapable.

Dear God, how I have suffered. Yet there are so many people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. I will not give their names to avoid any embarrassment. I have received glances which are as good as a prayer. And there are even those who have made vows on my behalf.

And what about me? I am going to try to pray in public this very minute without becoming embarrassed. My prayer goes like this: Dear God – no, I cannot, it is hopeless. But perhaps to invoke 'My God' is already a prayer. There is, however, one request I should like to make at once: God, let those whom I love outlive me for I could not bear their absence. This at least I ask of You.

TELEPHONE CALL

The telephone rang and I answered. It was for me. I usually ask who is calling because there are times when I do not wish to be disturbed.

But on this occasion there was something about the voice, so sweet and timid, which made me reply that this was me speaking. Then the voice said: I'm one of your readers and I'd like to wish you happiness. I asked: what is your name? She replied: I'm just a reader. I insisted: but I'd like to be able to address you by name when wishing you happiness. But it was useless, she was not prepared to identify herself, not even for me. She wanted

to be completely anonymous. But whoever you are, may you be happy and if you are not already married, may you find the man of your dreams. I must also ask you not to believe everything I write, for I can sometimes be harsh and I do not wish any of my harshness to rub off on you.

CHICO BUARQUE DE HOLANDA

I entered a restaurant with a friend and to my pleasant surprise came face to face with Carlinhos de Oliveira. I then looked around me. And what did I see? Chico Buarque de Holanda. I said to Carlinhos: when my children find out I have seen Chico Buarque they will respect me all the more. Whereupon Carlinhos, who had joined us at our table, called out: 'Chico!' He came over and I was introduced. He then surprised me by telling me: 'and to think I was reading one of your books only yesterday!'

Chico is attractive, timid, and rather sad. Oh, how I should like to tell him something – what? – to stop being so sad.

When I got home, I told my two little boys whom I had met. And although they may not respect me any more for it, they were flabbergasted.

This gave me an idea which may come to nothing. To invite Chico and Carlinhos to come and visit me. Then I could be with them again and, better still, my children would be able to meet Chico. I mentioned this idea to one of my boys who said he did not want to meet Chico. I asked him why not. He replied: 'because he's someone special.' I reassured him: 'but so are you', for by the age of seven he had listened to all our records of Beethoven and kept asking for more. How he enjoyed, felt and understood that music.

But I must respect my son's wishes. I asked him: 'If I invite Chico and he accepts, all you have to do is to shake his hand and then withdraw to your room.'

I also found Carlinhos sad. I asked: 'Why are we all so sad?' He replied: 'That's life.'

He is right. That is life.

NOTE TO THE TYPESETTER

Please forgive all the mistakes in my typescript. First of all, because I have severe burns on my right hand. And secondly for no reason I can explain.

Now for a request: do not make any corrections. Punctuation shows how a sentence breathes, and this is how my sentences breathe. And however odd you find my phrasing, all I ask is that you respect it. Even I have been forced into respecting my own prose.

Writing is a curse.

A REQUEST

No, this is more than a request. I am pleading. I am pleading with you to stop drinking so much. Drink in moderation by all means, because you need something to help you. Much too shy to seek human support, you have become dependent on drink. But I get frightened when I hear what people are saying about you. You are drinking three times as much as before. I implore you not to hasten your death. Live. Live. I know life can be cruel and difficult, but I want you to live. I myself struggle to go on living. In the name of God to Whom you owe your vocation as a monk, I implore you to drink less.

I have not found it easy to go on living. Believe me.

GOD

Even for non-believers, there is a dubious question: What comes after death? Even for non-believers there is a moment of despair: God help me. At this very moment I am asking God to help me. I need His help. I need it more than human strength. And I need my own strength. I am strong but also destructive. Self-destructive. And anyone who is self-destructive can also destroy others. I am hurting many people. And God must come to me since I have not gone to Him. Come, God, come. Even if I am undeserving, come. Or perhaps the least deserving are those who need You most. I can only say one thing in my defence: I have never hurt anyone deliberately. And when I do hurt others it distresses me. But I have so many faults. I can be moody, jealous, unkind, miserable. And yet there is love in my heart. How I wish I could show it instead of hurting people. If I have received so much love inside me yet go on being moody and unhappy, that is because I need God. Come to me, God, before it is too late.

A DREAM

The dream was so vivid that for some minutes I believed it was real. I dreamed it was New Year's Day. And when I opened my eyes I found myself saying: Happy New Year!

I cannot interpret dreams. But this one seems to suggest a deep desire to change my life. I need not even be *happy*. So long as it brings a new year. It is so difficult to change. Sometimes blood has to flow.

THE CHICK

One of my children brought home a yellow chick. It makes me feel such pity. The chick is clearly missing its mother. Feeling the shock of having been born from nothingness. And it has no thoughts, only sensations. Will it thrive? This one looks as if it might. Yet I was hoping otherwise. How is one to keep a cockerel or a hen in an apartment? Do you kill and eat it? What you breed, you do not kill. All you can do is wait and go on feeding it, and give it love from the warmth of your hands.

ANONYMITY

So many people want to be famous. Without realizing how this restricts life. I find my so-called fame irritating. I can no longer speak my mind. Anonymity is as lovely as a dream. And how I need this dream. Besides, I was hoping to give up writing. I am only carrying on because I need the money. I wanted to remain silent. For there are things I have never written and I shall take them with me to the grave. Those are things I shall never write at any price. There is a great silence inside me. And that silence has been the source of my words. And silence has given me the most precious thing of all: silence itself.

CHICO BUARQUE DE HOLANDA

I could have said this in person but I was afraid of betraying my excitement. As you know, I have no hesitation in inviting so-called celebrities to my house. But I did not invite you because

you are famous. I invited you because, apart from being extremely likeable, you have the most precious gift one could wish for: innocence. My children have this gift.

And while I may not show it, I, too, am innocent at heart. I hide my innocence because it has been wounded. I pray God that your innocence may never be wounded and last forever.

LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

First of all, I should like to know, Minister, if you are responsible for distributing the funds allocated to education. If not, this letter should be passed on to the President of the Republic. I feel rather shy about writing to the President, but have every right to address the Minister of Education, having been a student myself.

No doubt you will be surprised that a simple writer of fiction should take an interest in this thorny question of adequate funds for education – which in this case means securing places for surplus numbers of students. But the problem is so serious and at times absurd that it bothers me, although my own children are still much too young to be going to university.

In its efforts to evade the problem of the increasing number of students competing for fewer places, the Ministry of Education came up with the solution that entrance should be determined by classification, and that only those candidates with the highest marks are to qualify for the limited number of places. This measure rules out any judicial action on the part of those who are rejected. It does not prevent them, however, from taking to the streets to voice their protest.

Dear Minister or President: can one really speak of 'surplus students' in a country which is still under-developed? In a country which is in desperate need of educated men and women to bring about any progress? To allow only those candidates with the highest marks to enter our Faculties is to ignore the problem. You yourself have been a student and know perfectly well that it is not always the students who gain the highest marks who achieve greatest success in their chosen professions or prove to be the most capable when it comes to solving the country's real problems. And not everyone with the highest marks is fully entitled to a place at university. I myself scored high marks in the entrance examination when I decided to read

law. Yet for reasons I shall not go into here, I never took up my profession. So, in fact, I had no right to that place.

I do not feel that I am meddling in affairs which do not concern me. This matter concerns each and every one of us. And I am speaking on behalf of all those young men and women you are probably watching from your window as they await your decision.

Being a student is a serious business. This is the time when ideas are formed, a time when one thinks most about ways and means of helping Brazil. Dear Minister or President, to prevent young people from entering universities is criminal. Forgive such strong language. But these things need saying.

If university funds have been cut and the number of places reduced, then why not give prospective candidates psychological tests before they sit the entrance examinations in order to assess their mental aptitude and commitment to the profession of their choice? This would not only help to weed out unsuitable candidates but also help students to choose the right career. This is not my idea. It actually came from a student.

If only you knew, dear Minister or President, the sacrifices parents make in order to help a son or daughter fulfil their ambitions by studying at university. If only you knew of the deep and often crushing disappointment young people suffer when that word 'surplus' is mentioned. I have spoken to a young girl who was considered to be 'surplus' and I asked her how she felt. She told me of her bewilderment and sense of emptiness, while many of her fellow-students burst into tears upon being told that they, too, were 'surplus'. And they were not even free to organize a protest march because they knew the police might launch an attack.

Are you aware of how much the books cost for these entrance examinations? They cost a fortune and can only be bought by going without food and clothes unless one pays for them in instalments. And after so much sacrifice to find oneself rejected?

I hope these words will come to symbolize my protest march on behalf of those young people.

TO FEEL ONESELF USEFUL

Just as I was beginning to think of myself as being quite useless, I received a letter which had been signed but I will only reveal the person's initials: 'Every time I read these beautiful literary contributions of yours, my capacity for love seems stronger, I feel more willing than ever to sacrifice myself for others and to devote my whole life to my husband.' Signed H.M.

I was not very pleased, H.M., to have my articles described as beautiful. Firstly, because the word *beautiful* sounds artificial and secondly, because I have never felt my work to be less beautiful. Nor was I impressed by the expression *literary contributions*, for I am going through a phase in which the word *literature* makes me bristle like a cat. But how useful you made me feel, H.M., when you told me that your capacity for loving had been strengthened. Have I achieved so much? I am grateful. I am also grateful for the adolescent I once was who longed to be useful to other people, to Brazil and humanity, and who had no qualms about using such grand words when referring to herself.

ANOTHER LETTER

This one comes from Cabo Frio and the initials are L. de A. The letter seems to suggest that the person writing only began to read my work after I started writing a weekly column in the *Jornal do Brasil*. The reader was struck by my name which is not so very different from Larissa. Perhaps in response to something I may have written, she says that 'the writer, if genuine, always reveals herself'. And she ends her letter by saying: 'Please do not give up your weekly column with the excuse that you want to defend your privacy. For who could possibly take your place?'

For the moment, L. de A., I have no intention of giving up my column: but I am certainly learning how to protect my privacy. As for revealing myself, that would really be fatal, perhaps not so much in my articles as in my novels. The latter are by no means autobiographical but I am always being told by those who read them that I have revealed myself.

Paradoxically, there is alongside this need to defend my privacy a burning desire to confess in public, and not to a priest. The desire to say at long last what we all know to be true, yet keep to ourselves, as if it were forbidden to tell children that Father Christmas does not exist, even if they already know.

But who can tell, L. de A.? Perhaps one day I will be able to write a novel or short story revealing someone's most intimate secrets without leaving them naked, exposed and without shame. But there is no real danger: for human intimacy goes so deep that its final stages already merge with those first stages of what we call God.

That person called *the reader* is a strange and curious character. While remaining entirely individual in his reactions, the reader is so closely involved with the writer that the two actually become one and the same person.

HERMETIC?

I won a prize last year with a story for children called *The Mystery of the Thoughtful Rabbit*. Naturally, I was delighted. But I was even more delighted to discover that people refer to me as a *hermetic* writer. How come? Why is it that when I write for children, I am understood? Yet when I write for adults I suddenly become *difficult*? Should I write for adults with words and feelings suitable for children? Can I not speak to adults as between equals?

How frustrating, dear God, but scarcely worth bothering about.

PERSONA

No, no, I do not intend to speak about Ingmar Bergman's film. I was also struck dumb by the heart-rending guilt of a woman who hates the son who loves her so dearly. The woman chose silence to be able to live with her guilt. She refused to speak which would have mitigated her suffering. She chose eternal silence as her punishment. Nor do I wish to speak of the nurse whose future seemed to be assured by a husband and children until she began to absorb the personality of the mother who had chosen silence and turned into a woman who craves nothing and everything – and what is nothing? and what is everything? Yes, yes, I know that humanity has been spilling out ever since the appearance of the first man. I know that if silence says nothing, at least it does not lie, while words express what I do not want to say. Nor am I prepared to call Bergman a genius. We are the geniuses. We who have not learned how to possess ourselves of the one complete thing we were given at birth: the genius of life.

I am going to speak about the word *person* which brings to mind *persona*. I believe it was my father who taught me what I am about to relate. Whenever he heard someone being praised to the skies, Father would quietly comment, sober as a judge: Yes, he is quite a man. As if it were the greatest compliment one could pay to someone who has won his battle. And proud of belonging to the human race, I have gone on repeating those words ever since: 'Yes, he is quite a man.' Thank you, Father, for having taught me since childhood to distinguish between those who are truly born, live and die, and those people who cannot really be called persons.

Persona. I have such a poor memory that I can no longer remember if it was in the ancient theatre of Greece that the actors before entering the stage donned a mask which instantly revealed the role they were about to play.

I realize that one of the actor's greatest assets is his range of facial expressions which any mask is bound to conceal. Why then should I find the idea of actors coming on stage wearing masks so appealing? Who knows, perhaps I find a mask as reveal-

ing as any facial expression of sorrow. For even adolescents, whose faces are so utterly expressive, create their own masks once they begin to mature. And at the cost of great suffering. Because to know that from now on one will be playing a role comes as a shock. This is the horrible freedom of *not being*. It is the moment of choice.

Although I am not an actress, nor have I ever been associated with Greek theatre, I nevertheless wear a mask. That same mask we choose in adolescence so as not to remain exposed during the rest of the struggle. No, no, there is nothing wrong with leaving one's own face exposed to sensitivity. But there is always the danger that if left exposed, our face might be wounded and suddenly contract into some involuntary and terrifying mask. For it is much less dangerous to choose for oneself to be a *person*. To choose our own mask is the first voluntary human gesture. A solitary gesture. But when one finally dons the mask one has chosen in order to portray oneself and the world, one's body takes on a new firmness, his raised head is that of someone who has proudly overcome an obstacle. This person exists.

Although something might happen, which I am ashamed to mention.

After successfully using that mask for many years, suddenly – oh, less than suddenly – because of some fleeting glance or some word overheard – suddenly the mask of the war of life crumbles on one's face like dry clay, and the great lumps fall to the ground with a hollow thud. Exposing a mature and sensitive face now when least expected. And it weeps in silence in order not to die. For of one thing I am certain: the human being will die. Unless he is reborn, until it can be said of him: 'This is a person.' And as a person he is obliged to walk in Christ's footsteps.

THE SCREAM

I know that what I am writing here cannot be classified as a chronicle, column or article. But I know it is a cry from the heart. An exasperated cry of weariness! For I am weary! It is obvious that my love for the world has never prevented wars or deaths. Loving has never prevented me from secretly weeping tears of blood. Nor has it prevented fatal separations. Children bring much happiness. Yet I go on suffering the pains of childbirth every day. The world has failed me and I have failed the world. Therefore I no longer wish to love. What is left for me? To go on living like a robot until the moment of natural death? But I know that I cannot live like a robot: I need protection. The protection of love.

I have received love. Two grown-ups asked me to be their godmother. I even have a godchild: Cássio, the son of Maria Bonomi and Antunes Filho. And I offered to become the surrogate godmother of a young girl who needs my love. She sent me the following letter, posted here in Rio: 'I must tell you that yesterday I woke up blushing. Because I saw lots of things I have always seen yet never seen, I loved life's rhythm, you know what I mean, one day you suddenly find you have eyes to see. And it was so beautiful I offered my day to you. It is not much of a present for someone as lovely – lovely as you are (I must talk to her when we are alone) but it was so beautiful and big and bright. Today I am my usual idle self, unable even to make the effort to ring up my godmother and tell her how much I love her.'

The most curious thing about my two grown-up goddaughters – one entirely different from the other – the most curious thing is just how much they have helped me. What could I have given them to make them want me as their godmother?

Coming back to my weariness, I am tired of all these people who find me so pleasant. The people I like are those who find me unpleasant because with them I can feel a certain affinity: I heartily dislike myself.

What am I to do with myself? Not much. I shall give up writing books. For if I write any more, I shall say such harsh things that they will deeply upset me and others. There is a limit to being oneself. And I have reached that limit.

THE GREATEST COMPLIMENT I EVER RECEIVED

I was walking down a street in Naples with my husband. And a man said in a loud voice to his companion so that I should hear: 'With women like her we could rebuild Italy.' I have not rebuilt Italy. Instead, I have tried to rebuild my home, my children and myself. I have not been successful. However, the Italian was not paying me a compliment, he was being quite serious. May God help me to restore, at least, a flower. It does not even need to be an orchid, just an ordinary wild flower you can find anywhere in the fields. But I shall let you into a secret: I must rebuild something at once, this very day, for there is no time to lose. I can say no more.

THE WHITE DRESS

I woke up in the middle of the night longing to possess a white dress. Made of the finest chiffon. My longing was intense and clear. I believe it was my perpetual innocence. I know that some people find me dangerous. They have even told me so to my face. But I am also innocent. The desire to dress in white has always been the thing that saved me. I know, and perhaps only I and a few others know, that if there is something dangerous about me, there is also something pure. And that purity is only dangerous for those who have danger inside them. The purity I speak of is transparent: one even accepts the bad things. And it has the same effect as that white chiffon dress. Perhaps I will never possess it, yet it is as if I possessed it already, because one learns to live with what is so sadly lacking. I also long for a black dress which will make me look fairer and accentuate my purity. Is this really purity? The primitive is pure. Spontaneity is pure. Is evil pure? I am not sure. What I do know for certain is that sometimes the root of evil is of an impossible purity.

I woke up in the middle of the night with such intense longing for a white chiffon dress, that I got up and looked in my wardrobe. I found one white dress in thick material with a round neckline. Is thickness purity? One thing I do know: love, however violent, is pure.

And that is how I have come to discover that I am not pure.

THE REMNANTS OF CARNIVAL

No, not of this latest carnival. Yet for some strange reason the last few days have taken me back to my childhood and those Ash Wednesdays in deserted streets where the debris of streamers and confetti was being blown around. Now and then, some old woman heading for church with a veil over her head, could be seen crossing the road which always looked so empty after carnival. Until the following year. And as the festivities approached, how can I describe my excitement? As if the world, like some great bud, were about to blossom into a huge red rose. As if the streets and squares of Recife were finally coming into their own. As if human voices were chanting at long last my secret capacity for pleasure. Carnival was mine, all mine.

But in reality I took little part in carnival. I had never been to a children's ball, I had never worn a costume and mask. In recompense, I was allowed to stay up until eleven at night and to stand at the entrance on the ground floor of the two-storey building in which we lived, avidly watching others enjoying themselves. I was given two precious gifts which I used sparingly so that they would last for three days: one was an ether spray, the other a bag of confetti. Oh, how difficult to write about such moments. To this day I can remember how my heart would sink upon realizing that, even without taking part in the festivities, I was so excited that any little thing was enough to make me a happy little girl.

And those carnival masks? They frightened me but that fear was inevitable and necessary because it confirmed my deep suspicion that the human face is not unlike a mask. Standing there in the doorway, if a masquerader happened to speak to me, I would suddenly enter into vital contact with my inner world which consisted not only of dwarfs and enchanted princes, but of human beings with their own mystery. So even that fear of masqueraders was something I needed.

No one at home offered to make me a fancy dress. With so much worry because of my mother's illness, my sisters were too busy to think about carnival and the children's ball. But I persuaded one of my sisters to put my depressingly straight hair

into curlers so that I might have the satisfaction of seeing my hair in curls, at least for carnival. During those three days my sister also gave in to my earnest pleas to be allowed to wear make-up like teenage girls, for I could scarcely wait to be rid of my vulnerable childhood. Wearing lipstick and rouge, I felt pretty and feminine and I was no longer a child.

But there was one carnival that was different from the others. So miraculous that I could scarcely believe my good fortune, for I had become accustomed to asking for so little. A friend's mother had decided to make her a costume and the theme was to be *a rose*. She had bought endless sheets of pink crepe-paper, presumably hoping to create the impression of layers and layers of rose-petals. I watched in amazement as the costume gradually took shape. The finished product bore no resemblance to rose-petals but I honestly believed it was one of the loveliest costumes I had ever seen.

Then the unexpected happened: there were still sheets of crepe-paper left over, lots of them. Perhaps in answer to my silent prayer, or sensing my envy and despair, or simply out of kindness, my friend's mother offered to make me a *rose* costume, too, with the remnants of the crepe-paper. So for the first time in my life, I was to have what I had always wanted. During those three days of carnival I would pretend to be someone else.

Even the preparations made me dizzy with excitement. I had never been kept so busy as my friend and I made careful plans. Beneath our costumes we would wear underslips so that if it started to rain and our costumes disintegrated, at least we would be respectable. The very thought of a sudden downpour of rain leaving two eight-year-old girls standing there in the street, dressed in nothing but flimsy underslips, caused us acute embarrassment before carnival had even started. But God would come to our assistance! There would be no rain! When I remembered that I only possessed a costume because enough crepe-paper had been left over, I swallowed my pride (which had always been ferocious) with some resentment, and humbly accepted what fate had charitably given me.

Yet why did that year's carnival, the only carnival when I possessed a costume, have to be so sad? Early on Sunday morning, I was already in my curlers so that my hair would be nicely set by the afternoon. The minutes dragged on, I was becoming so impatient. At last, at long last! Three o'clock in the afternoon. Taking care not to tear the paper, I dressed up as a *rose*.

Many worse things have happened to me and I have shrugged them off. But this particular set-back haunts me to this day. Why does the game of fate seem so irrational? So implacable and cruel? No sooner was I dressed in my crepe-paper costume with my hair still in curlers and waiting to have my face made up with lipstick and rouge, than my mother's condition suddenly deteriorated. The house was in a panic and I was sent in haste to a near-by chemist to buy medicine. I ran all the way dressed as *a rose* – my face bereft of make-up and so unmistakably that of a child. Bewildered and in a daze, I kept on running among streamers, confetti and the cries of carnival. The happiness of those revellers terrified me.

Hours later, when things had calmed down at home, my sister combed my hair and made up my face. But something had died inside me. As in those tales I used to read about fairies who bewitched people and then broke the spell, I felt my spell had been broken: I was no longer a rose and had turned back into a little girl. I went down on to the street and as I stood there I was no longer a flower, but a pensive clown with scarlet lips. In my desire to experience ecstasy I would start to feel happy, only to remember with remorse that my mother was seriously ill and once again something died inside me.

Salvation only came hours later. And how I clung to it, so great was my need to be saved. A handsome, twelve-year-old boy, who in my eyes seemed much older, came up to me and with a gesture of affection, daring, mischief and sensuality, covered my hair, no longer curly, with confetti. For a second we stood there, staring at each other, smiling in silence. And so this little eight-year-old woman was able to convince herself for the rest of the evening that someone had finally acknowledged her. I had become a rose after all.

HEY, CHICO

I say, Chico Buarque, you won't believe this. I have just received a letter concerning both of us from a town called Santa Maria in Rio Grande do Sul. I had better explain. A girl read an article of mine in a Porto Alegre newspaper. She is in her teens and apparently feels a deep affinity with the things I express. But that affinity was sealed when I wrote an article about you, Chico. She writes: 'Like you, I adore the man. I thought this infatuation (which my friends ridicule) was rather foolish, perhaps even childish, but after reading your article I felt reassured. The reason is exactly the one you yourself gave: Chico exudes such innocence that one cannot help liking him. You have the same innocence, and it shows in everything you write.' The girl has clearly misunderstood me, Chico. You are not my idol. I have no idols. To me you are a splendid fellow, talented and with a heart of gold. And I feel so happy as I listen over and over again to your recording of *A Banda* [The Band], so happy that one day I even started dancing with one of my little boys. But that is all, dear friend. And the girl goes on to say: 'I'd love to meet you and Chico. Perhaps I could ask a favour. If he should ever visit you, do invite me even though I live far away. Because if we are both mad about him, and he and I are mad about you, who knows, perhaps we will become good friends.'

Say, Chico, can you imagine me sending a telegram to Santa Maria: 'Come at once because Chico is visiting me tomorrow'? Can you picture her arriving in a state of great excitement, and you standing there with a grin on your face? Look, dear girl, your letter is sweet and I am sure Chico would love you, I really mean it. For if Chico and I exude innocence, you, dear girl, are a thousand times more innocent than we are. I am sending you a kiss and I am sure Chico would also send you a kiss – no, no, you mustn't swoon. Let me tell you a secret about kisses. It was eleven-thirty on a Wednesday night and, as Chico was leaving my apartment, I gave him a big kiss on both cheeks, leaving red lipstick marks, seven centimetres by four to be precise. My friend Xiko Buark must have had some explaining to do when he got home.

ANA LUISA, LUCIANA AND AN OCTOPUS

I was expecting a friend to call and the door-bell rang. I thought to myself: he said he would telephone again but he must have decided to come straight on. I answered the door but it was not him. Standing there was a young woman with dishevelled hair and an attractive voice, a copy of the *Jornal do Brasil* [The Brazilian Times] in one hand and in the other the strangest looking parcel. Somewhat flustered, she explained: 'I feel rather awkward disturbing you like this, but I simply had to come. The things you wrote in your column today sum up exactly how I feel. I live opposite and I was at my window the night your apartment caught fire, and whenever I see your light on I know that you are having a sleepless night. So I've brought you an octopus.'

I stood there in amazement. Recovering my composure, I invited her in. She is one of those nervous people who overcome their shyness by blurting everything out in sudden outbursts, without pausing for breath. She is called Ana Luísa. Within minutes I knew something of her life: she has a little girl of seven or nine called Luciana and a boy of three. I then discovered that Luciana is mad about animals, especially rabbits, so I decided to send her a copy of my book: *O Mistério do Coelho Pensante* [The Mystery of the Thoughtful Rabbit]. I was also informed that Luciana paints extremely well. She once painted a picture of the rain and then announced: 'That's a cloud crying over a flower.' I took an immediate liking to that child. So there. But what about the octopus?

To cut a long story short: Ana Luísa wanted to know if I liked octopus; I could not remember, it was so long since I had eaten one. To my horror she then asked me if I knew how to cook octopus and I assured her I did not. She herself had been taught how to cook them by a poor man from the slums who had the most awful nickname because of his wife's affairs with other men. This man had taught Ana Luísa how to clean an octopus and cook it in various ways. She then asked me how I would prefer the octopus she was about to prepare for me, whether I would prefer it fried in oil or boiled with rice. Still feeling rather bewildered, I settled for octopus 'with rice'. She then confided: 'I don't often serve octopus at home, because however much I enjoy cooking it, I find it nasty to clean. I shall prepare it tonight, leave it in salt water all day tomorrow and have it ready for you by lunch-time on Monday.'

It was only after she had gone that I began to see the novelty of this gift. People have given me perfume, jewellery, pictures, books – but never an octopus. On Sunday morning I was still feeling apprehensive. And for some curious reason, I decided to look up the Portuguese word for *octopus* in the dictionary. The word is *polvo* and the definition is quite revolting: a genus of the cephalopod molluscs, characterized by eight tentacles surrounding the mouth and provided with suckers. This is immediately followed by the word: *polvarim* which is 'the dust given off by gun-powder'.

On Monday, Ana Luísa duly turned up, her hair neatly combed, and wearing a smart pair of slacks. She was carrying a piping hot tureen of the most delicious rice cooked with octopus: pink in colour. When she left, we sat round the table, uncertain as to which ritual should be observed before starting. We ate in silence, eyeing each other from time to time as if looking for some reaction. We finally decided that Ana Luísa *really* knows how to prepare octopus, but I cannot say I like those tentacles. However, the rice was excellent.

A week later she sent me – she does not wish to be intrusive and to be frank I hate people intruding – she sent me another tureen of rice cooked with other ingredients which I recognized as shellfish. It had the most delicious flavour and provided a feast for me, my children, and a friend whose initials are S.M. Dear Ana Luísa, I have mislaid your address, which explains why I have not sent back your tureens.

That is all I have to say.

MARIA CRYING ON THE TELEPHONE

The telephone rings and I answer. A woman with a strange voice asks for me, and before I have time to think and pretend my sister is answering, she says: 'Oh, it's you.' So I had no choice except to be myself. But...was she sobbing, or what? For she definitely sounded as if she was trying to hold back her tears. 'Why did you say in your latest article that you are not going to write any more novels?' 'Don't worry, dear, I shall probably write a few more, but a writer has to know when to stop. Which of my books have you read?' 'Nearly all of them except *A Cidade Sitiada* [The Besieged City] and *A Legião Estrangeira* [The Foreign Legion].' 'Instead of crying, why don't you come round

and I'll give you the two books.' 'No, I couldn't do that, I shall buy them.' 'Don't be silly, here I am offering you two autographed books and a coffee or whisky into the bargain.' 'Well, perhaps I could ask you to do me a favour. Autograph the two books and give them to your brother-in-law. Tell him they are for Maria.' 'Maria who?' 'Just Maria.' 'All right, but do stop crying and take something for that cold.' And that was that. My brother-in-law afterwards informed me that Maria was a gynaecologist called Dr Maria B. Some time later, she sent me the loveliest roses I have ever seen, which I arranged in a vase with the blood-red roses H.M. sent me. I love my apartment to smell of roses. And thanks to the generosity of readers like Dr B. and friends like S.M. I have been able to make a nice home for my children.

The roses sent by H.M., who later telephoned to wish me a good night's sleep, arrived with a very nice card. 'Is that the house of flowers? I just wanted to make sure that Dona Clarice is not away.' 'No, she is here at home. Thank you,' I said, embarrassed by so much love. (He had just finished reading *A Legião Estrangeira*.) 'Thank you, Clarice Lispector. All I ask at this moment is that you outlive me. Many thanks, too, for convincing me of your love of roses. And for constantly reassuring me that I exist. So much so, that I can remember you without feeling any remorse at having lied on the telephone. I was the one who felt the need to send you roses but I want all the happiness to be yours.'

Thank you H.M. Your flowers gave me so much happiness and I have so much confidence in you that I am going to ask a favour: I am looking for white rose-buds to send to a little friend of mine who was born a few days ago and whose name is Letícia, which means Happiness. If you know where I might find them, please give me a call.

THE INGENUOUS MARIA CARLOTA

She is my maid. She served me a cup of coffee and stood there staring at me. I felt embarrassed because in summer I walk around the house with bare feet and wearing nothing except a short cotton nightdress. 'I'm looking rather sloppy, wouldn't you say, Maria Carlota?' And she replied: 'All mistresses look the same in summer. I used to work in one house where the mistress received men in her nightdress.' 'Yes, well she wasn't exactly a mistress, was she?' 'What was she then?' 'Forget it, Maria Carlota. I'm sorry. I was talking nonsense.'

ARMANDO NOGUEIRA, FOOTBALL AND SILLY ME

The title could have been much longer but there was not enough space.

I do not read Armando Nogueira's sports column every day – but I always take a quick glance – because 'my knowledge of football' is rather sketchy. Although Armando writes so beautifully (not just *well*), that even when I get bogged down by the technical aspects of football, I can still enjoy his prose. And it must have been in an article I overlooked in the *Correio da Manhã* [Morning Post] where Armando Nogueira was quoted alongside people like Robert Kennedy, Fernandel, Arthur Schlesinger, Geraldine Chaplin, and Tristão de Athayde among others. Someone read the quotation to me over the telephone. Armando was quoted as saying: 'I would gladly sacrifice my team's victory in an important match for an article...' and here is the real surprise: he would sacrifice all this for an article written by me about football.

My initial reaction was to take sweet revenge by affectionately suggesting that I would sacrifice many things which are important to me for an article by Armando Nogueira on a subject such as life. And my revenge forgotten, I should like to follow up that initial reaction by challenging you, Armando Nogueira, to forget your shyness and to write about life or yourself, which would come to much the same thing.

But if your team happened to be Botafogo, I would never forgive you if you sacrificed one of their victories, even in jest, for an entire novel of mine about football.

Let me tell you about my interest in football, which prompted the words *silly me* in the title. I support Botafogo, which could create quite a situation were it not for my restraint, for I always try to keep a tight rein on my tendency to be excessive. The problem is this: it is not easy for me to take sides when it comes to football. I can hear you exclaim: How unlike a Brazilian! But you must understand that I have one son who supports Botafogo and the other Flamengo. And I fear I am letting down the one who backs Flamengo. The fault is not entirely mine because he, too, supported Botafogo until, for no good reason, perhaps to

please his father, he suddenly decided to become a Flamengo supporter. By then it was much too late for me to decide not to support anyone, however hard I might try. I had given all my support to Botafogo, even my passionate ignorance about football. I say 'passionate ignorance', because I feel that one day I might even come to understand football with passion.

And now I must confess my guilty secret: apart from all the times I have watched football on the television, I have only been to one football match in my life, that is to say in the flesh. I feel I have no right to call myself a good football supporter or, for that matter, a good Brazilian.

Who was playing? I know Botafogo was playing but I cannot remember the name of the other team. The person who was with me could not take his eyes off the field, nor could I, but unlike me, he understood everything. And I made a nuisance of myself by badgering him with questions. Which my companion answered as briefly and quickly as possible to discourage me from interrupting.

No, no, do not imagine that I am about to compare football with ballet. What I remember was a struggle between life and death, a confrontation between gladiators. I am probably being foolish again, but I got the impression that the match did not get out of control and turn into a blood-bath only because the referee was keeping a watchful eye and sent off anyone who behaved as badly as I should have done had I been playing. Well, much as I love football, I should never be tempted to play the game. I should prefer to take up ballet. But is it true that football resembles ballet? In my opinion, football has a beauty of its own and defies any comparison.

As for watching football on television, my son who supports Botafogo watches with me. And when I start asking silly questions, he answers me with pity and exasperation. But there is even a hint of affection for this mother of his who may be well-informed about certain things but knows little or nothing about football. He, too, gives me abrupt answers in order not to miss any exciting moments of the match. And if I bother him with too many questions, he usually ends up by saying without anger: 'Oh Mummy, you'll never get the hang of football!'

Those words humiliate me. So in my eagerness to participate in everything, especially football which is so Brazilian, must I resign myself to never understanding the game? And when I think of all the things in which I do not participate, Brazilian

or otherwise, I become disheartened by my poverty. I am much too eager and determined to accept with equanimity any non-participation in things which constitute life. But I have not given up trying. And one day I shall finally master the finer points of football. Even if I have to wait until I am a doddering, old woman, unsteady on her feet. Or do you disapprove of those trendy old women who are unjustly made to feel ridiculous simply because they decide to take an interest in things they ought to have put behind them? The fact is that when it comes to football, and many other things, too, I am not content with a past: I want a present and even some promise of a future.

Now, Armando Nogueira, let me repeat my friendly challenge: write about life and that means your life. (Even if you were not a sports columnist, you would still be a writer.) You could begin your article by discussing football. That would help you to get rid of your shyness before starting to discuss yourself. And to make things easier for you, I have no objection to a whole article about *what football means to you personally and not just as a sport* because that would ultimately reveal how you relate football to life. Is that asking too much of someone who is used to a specific topic? I have the impression that you underestimate your own ability: your style of writing convinces me that you are perfectly capable of writing on a wide range of topics. Let me know when you are ready to take up my challenge for, as I explained, I do not read your column every day, proud as I am of having you as a colleague on the same newspaper. Armando Nogueira, I am waiting.

STATE OF GRACE (EXTRACT)

Anyone who has experienced a state of grace will know what I am talking about. I am not referring to inspiration, which is a special grace that comes to those who struggle with art.

The state of grace to which I refer cannot be used for anything. It would appear to come just to let us know it really exists. When in this state, the tranquil happiness which radiates from people and things is enhanced by a lucidity which can only be described as light because in a state of grace everything is so very, very bright. It is the lucidity of those who are no longer surmising: they simply know. Just that: they know. Do not ask me what they know, for I can only reply in the same childish manner: they simply know.

And there is a physical bliss which cannot be compared to anything. The body is transformed into a gift. And one feels it is a gift because one is experiencing at source the unmistakable good fortune of material existence.

In a state of grace, one sometimes perceives the deep beauty, hitherto unattainable, of another person. And everything acquires a kind of halo which is not imaginary: it comes from the splendour of the almost mathematical light emanating from people and things. One starts to feel that everything in existence – whether people or things – breathes and exhales the subtle light of energy. The world's truth is impalpable.

It bears no relation to what I vaguely imagine the state of grace of saints to be. For that is a state of grace I myself have never experienced and cannot even envisage. No, this is simply the state of grace of an ordinary person who suddenly becomes totally real since he is ordinary, human, and recognizable.

The discoveries made in this state of grace cannot be described or conveyed. So when I find myself in a state of grace, I sit quietly without uttering a word. As if awaiting an annunciation. But unheralded by those angels who presumably precede the state of grace of the saints. As if the angel of life were coming to announce the world.

Then the angel slowly withdraws. Not in a state of trance – for there is no trance – the angel slowly withdraws, sighing, as

if already familiar with the world as it is. The angel's sigh is also one of longing. For having tried to acquire a body and a soul and a place on earth, the angel desires these things more and more. It is useless to desire: things only come when desired spontaneously.

I cannot explain it, but I find that animals are more often in an existential state of grace than human beings. Except that animals do not know, while human beings can perceive these things. Human beings come up against obstacles which do not affect the lives of animals, such as reasoning, logic and understanding. While animals enjoy the splendour of that which is direct and proceeds directly.

God knows what He is doing: I do not believe the state of grace should be bestowed on us too often. Otherwise we might pass forever on to *the other side* of life, which is also real but no one would understand us any more. We should lose our common language.

It is also a good thing that grace should not come as often as I should like. For I might get used to happiness (I forgot to mention that one feels extremely happy when in a state of grace). To get used to happiness could be dangerous. We could become more selfish because happy people are selfish. They are less sensitive to human suffering and we might not feel obliged to try and help those in need – simply because we possess the essence and compensation of life when we are in a state of grace.

No, even if the choice were mine, I should not want to be in a state of grace too often. It would be like becoming addicted to some vice. I should become a contemplative like those who smoke opium. And were that state of grace to occur too often, I feel certain I should abuse it: I should start expecting to live in a permanent state of grace. And this would result in an unforgivable flight from destiny, which is simply human, made up of conflict and suffering, of uncertainties and minor joys.

It is better if the state of grace is short-lived. Should it last too long, as I well know, familiar as I am with my almost childish ambitions, I should end up trying to penetrate the enigmas of Nature. And that would be enough to banish all grace. For grace is a gift which makes no demands, but it would disappear if we were to start demanding answers. We must never forget that the state of grace is only a tiny aperture which allows us to glimpse a sort of tranquil Paradise, but it is not an entrance, nor does it give us the right to eat the fruits of the orchards.

One emerges from a state of grace with clear skin and open, thoughtful eyes. And, even without a trace of happiness, it is as if one's whole body were bathed in a gentle smile. And one comes away a better person than when one entered. To have known grace is to have experienced something which appears to redeem the human condition while accentuating the strict limitations of that condition. After experiencing grace, the human condition is revealed in all its wretched poverty, thereby teaching us to love more, to forgive more, and show greater faith. One begins to have a certain confidence in suffering and its ways, which can so often become unbearable.

Some days are so arid and empty that I would give years of my life in exchange for a few minutes' grace.

P.S. – I am united, body and soul, with the students of Brazil in their tragic plight.

FAREWELL, I AM ON MY WAY!

Alas, I am unable to reply to readers' letters, with few exceptions. But I received one letter which combined words of aggression with delicate sentiments. It was what one might call *brutally frank*. The letter was prompted by an article of mine in which I said that I preferred to be unpleasant. The reader wrote: 'I am not so imprudent as to suggest that I find you pleasant with all your ups and downs, but I have no hesitation in saying I find you beautiful.'

He says he has met me, but I have a hopeless memory, and cannot even visualize a person of that name. The letter goes on: 'In some ways you are a worthy compatriot of Chekhov. In others, you're just like people here. I don't mean people from Cruz Alta or Montes Claros, but from Bagé or Cascadura.' My dear man, I am not in the least concerned about being identified with people from Bagé or Cascadura. I write for those who care to read me. Francisco, you complain too much, sometimes with reason, sometimes unjustly. I am not in the least irritated: I, too, have created a life for myself that permits me to say and hear everything. But there are certain comments in your letter which leave me in doubt as to whether I am being insulted or praised.

You complain about my despondency. You are right, Francisco, I do feel rather depressed. I am much too dependent on others to shake off this depression which is shared by thousands of others. Yet the minute the telephone rings or I am with someone whom I like, my hopes are revived and I feel strong again. You must have met me when I was in a much more optimistic mood.

How do I know? Because you describe me as beautiful. Well, I am not beautiful. But when I am hopeful, something lights up inside me which could be described as beautiful.

I can understand you wanting me to write entertaining stories like Chekhov. Dear friend, if I were to write just one page like Chekhov, I would be a great writer and not the vulnerable creature that I am. Do not worry, Francisco, my time for writing entertaining stories will come. It is true that I have my ups and downs but one of these days I will look out for a great sea-wave and ride on its crest. A time for laughter must come, Francisco.

I cannot wait for that time to arrive, which is a good sign: it means that the moment for self-renewal amidst all these ashes is drawing near. Meanwhile, I have got used to laughing or crying according to my mood.

In your letter, Francisco, you offer me 'your Kingdom, your horse, and a plate of lentils'. Consider me the most humble of servants in your Kingdom. I am also willing, Francisco, to fly on your horse in the dark, because you have left me in the dark, Francisco, without offering me some arena where I might blossom in the light. And that is what I need most. But you are a good man, and even though disappointed at my persistent depression, you are offering me this incomparable delicacy: a plate of lentils. At last someone has realized that I am hungry.

Then you came up with such a wonderful proposal that I, too, felt wonderful. If I do not accept, it is truly because I cannot. With the simplicity of someone who is spiritually rich, you suggest the following:

'Let us escape to Hong Kong or to some even more remote place.'

And you go on to say, 'May God protect us forever and ever.'

Amen, Francisco, and my heartfelt thanks. I want everything you have to offer me. It is a long time since anyone gave me a plate of lentils for this ancestral hunger of mine. On your horse, Francisco, we shall travel so far! Nevermore to return! Farewell, world! I am already mounted on this magnificent horse which will carry me to the light. I am finally on my way to Shangri-la!

The other letters in this latest batch are from ingenuous readers who have every confidence in me. I find it difficult to choose the letters which touched me most. All of them warmed my heart, all of them extended a helping hand as I struggle up the slope in order to contemplate the world's vast landscape. Every single one of those letters did me much good. I am happy with my weekly column. I have published nine books which have made people love me from afar. But writing a weekly column has confronted me with a mystery I fail to understand: journalists who write them, at least here in Rio, have a wide readership. And writing these articles every Saturday has certainly brought me more love than I have ever known. I feel so close to those who read my articles. And I am privileged to be able to write for a newspaper I respect. I can only think of three or four other women who regularly write for the newspapers: Elsie Lessa, Rachel de Queiroz, Dinah Silveira de Queirós and myself. I must

telephone Elsie, who has been writing a column for much longer than me, to ask her what I should do about the marvellous telephone calls I receive, the lovely, sweet-smelling roses people give me, and the simple yet profound letters people send in.

I promise my readers that I shall try to sound more cheerful. But, oh dear, how does one remain cheerful? For I can no longer bear the solitude in the world of Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Long live Drummond so that I may go on telephoning him from time to time, always for some good reason, otherwise I should never have the courage to interrupt his work. But today I summoned up enough courage to sound hopeful, as you must have noticed, Francisco. And I spoke to Drummond on the telephone, barely resisting the temptation to call him Carlinhos, because we must not forget that for all his immense greatness, he is also Carlinhos and that is what his mother used to call him. He, too, needs a little pampering. But I must pause for a moment because Francisco's horse is going much too fast and if I am not careful I shall find myself writing the first chapter of yet another novel. Unfortunately, I submit my articles ahead of time so that when they are published early on Saturday mornings, like fresh bread coming out of a hot oven, the sky might have turned red, the moon have started to wane, and my mood have changed yet again.

Yes, Otávio Bonfim, writing for a newspaper is an experience I am happy to renew, and to be a journalist, as I once was and have become once more, is a grand profession. Communicating with another human being through the written word is wonderful. Were I to be deprived of this struggle with words, I should have to dance or paint. I should have to devise some means or other of communicating with the world. Writing turns human beings into gods.

How? But how have I managed to write nine books without telling you in at least one of them that I love you? I love anyone who has the patience to wait for me, to wait for my voice to speak through the written word. Suddenly I feel so responsible. For if I have always known how to use words – however clumsily at times – then it would be criminal of me not to say, however inadequately, what you want to hear from me. And what do you want to hear from me? The instrument is here is my hand but I do not know how to play it. That is my problem. And there is no solution. Because I lack the courage? Must I suppress my love, must I disguise my feelings and deny my love for others?

In order to salvage this night and its full moon, let me repeat: I love you.

I have no bread to offer: only words. And it distresses me to be so poor. I was having yet another sleepless night and went on to the terrace to watch the full moon – I am much more lunar than solar. And I am in danger of being overwhelmed by a solitude much greater than any human being can withstand unless I write: I love you. How can I explain this feeling that I am mother of the world? Yet to say 'I love you' is almost more than I can bear! It hurts. It hurts more than impatient love. Yet I go on waiting.

POINTLESS SCANDAL

I know I am in danger of scandalizing both my female and male readers. And for some curious reason, more likely my male than female readers.

Let me start at the beginning. And the beginning is rather shocking. So be prepared. I decided to interview the proprietress of a hostel for women of dubious reputation.

There now, I have confessed. There is no need to feel nervous, I assure you. My motives were and remain quite harmless. I am innocent.

I am not allowed to say how I discovered the address and telephone number of this woman whom I shall refer to as 'Madame X'. I have no intention of naming her and getting her into trouble with the police, that is if they even bother about such establishments. Once in possession of the number, I telephoned her.

At the outset of our conversation, I sensed a note of mistrust on the part of Madame X: she was not quite sure what I wanted, and God alone knows what she thought I wanted. But soon she was saying to me: 'Well, of course, dearie.' I explained that I was anxious to arrange a meeting and asked if we could have a drink together, wherever she preferred. She suggested I should go to the hostel. But Dearie preferred not to. Nor can I imagine why she chose to meet me in front of the Jaci Pharmacy in José de Alencar Square. She could not have chosen a worse spot: men pass in droves and no need to ask what they must have thought on seeing a woman standing there on her own.

Why did I want to interview Madame X? Well, as an adolescent I was bewildered and confused and there was one silent but nagging question bothering me: 'What is the world like? And why this world?' Later, I was to learn lots of things. But that question from my adolescence continued to bother me, silent and persistent.

So what did I learn on Earth in order to open these narrow eyes of mine just a little? I recognized that the problem of prostitution is one of a social order. But there is also a deeper problem: the fact that lots of men prefer to pay, precisely in order to

humiliate women and be humiliated in turn. This rejection of love is a sad reality. Men pay in order to avoid love. There are even married men who like to maintain a home in order to transform their wives into possessions for which they have paid.

Now then, I telephoned Madame X in the morning before setting out to meet her. But she explained she had an appointment to see her doctor. I asked her what was wrong. She had what every Madame running a hostel for women was bound to have: a weak heart. I said I would telephone her later. What a business trying to get through. Her number was constantly engaged. God knows why, and so do we. Her hostel is very *private and secluded*, as she was careful to point out, so any *meetings* had to be arranged by telephone. I finally managed to get through and Madame X announced: 'I feel much worse and I really must lie down. Ring me again at four o'clock.' I thought to myself: I wonder if the old girl is going to die on me before I get to meet her.

No, no, this was no easy assignment. When we first made contact by telephone, I had a violent headache and it only passed after I realized it had been brought on by the thought that I was committing a sin. That same night I had a nightmare in which Madame X confided she was suffering from leprosy. I was terrified of touching her and woke up in a panic. Why then did I insist on seeing her? Because I had to find some irrefutable reply.

I waited for one hour and a half in front of the Jaci Pharmacy. No sign of Madame X. I went back home and telephoned. She assured me she had waited half an hour for me. I lost all interest. Weeks passed, and I had almost forgotten all about her. But I am one of those people who do not give up easily. I telephoned her again. And once more, she arranged to meet me in front of the Jaci Pharmacy. This time she asked me to be there at ten because she would be *very busy* in the afternoon.

I did not have long to wait. At that hour in the morning, the only passers-by are women carrying their shopping. She arrived wearing the outfit she had described to me. And how elegant she looked. Certainly much more elegant than me who has no need to be elegant.

She explained at once that her hostel was a family business. The widowed brother-in-law who looked after her affairs also had other business interests. I asked her if the hostel made money. She replied in the negative. Liar! We retired to a nearby café which was just opening and I ordered the same thing as Madame: grape juice.

How insipid, dear God. Madame X has a daughter who studies ballet. Lost for conversation, we began discussing the horrors of fire. She told me she had experienced several fires but had always managed to throw the blazing mattress out of the window before it could do much damage.

The amusing thing is that she took a liking to me. She suggested: 'Now that we've got to know each other, telephone me when you have a spare moment so we can have a little chat.' I thought to myself: Not on your life, I am not interested.

She told me: 'Men, poor things! They need a place where they can feel safe. Thank goodness that Red Light district has disappeared. It was awful. Really awful.'

What more is there to tell? Nothing. She was in no hurry to leave nor was I. But I was the first to make a move. And she let me pay for the drinks. I lost any appetite for lunch that day.

What had I expected in the end? Had the question which nagged me in adolescence died? Is the world insipid? Or is it me? Or is it Madame X who is insipid? Probably all three of us. I felt that my day had been ruined.

When I told a friend of mine about the interview, his only comment was to calmly suggest: That's where the writer comes in. But I am not a writer. I am a person who is curious about the world. But who stopped being curious, at least on that day. I did not even feel hungry.

Full of indignation, Madame X also told me that the *girls* who take up this kind of work can think of nothing except getting rich. Who can blame them?

And here ends the interview which turned out to be a fiasco. But we all have our little fiascos.

MILD HAPPINESS (EXTRACT)

An hour of darkness, perhaps the greatest darkness, and in the middle of the day, preceded this thing which I cannot even begin to describe. Night in the middle of the day and this thing which I hesitate to try and describe is a tranquil light inside me which could be called happiness, mild happiness. I am somewhat disorientated as if my heart had been plucked from me, only to be replaced by a sudden absence, an almost palpable absence of what hitherto had been a human organ bathed in the daily darkness of suffering. I do not feel anything. Yet it is the opposite of inertia. It is a lighter and more silent form of existence.

But I am also uneasy. I was prepared to console myself with my anguish and suffering. But how can I console myself with this effortless, tranquil contentment? I am not used to being able to do without consolation. The word consolation took me unawares without my noticing, and when I looked for it, consolation had already transformed itself into flesh and spirit and no longer existed as thought.

I go to the window and the rain is heavy. I instinctively try to find something in the rain that might console me at some other moment. But I have no sorrow to console.

Ah, now I know. I am now hoping to find in the rain a joy so great and so acute that it will bring me into contact with a wounding sharpness akin to that of sorrow. But my search is futile. I am at the window and this is all that happens: I watch the rain lovingly and the rain returns my gaze. We come pouring down in harmony. How long will this state of mine last? I am aware as I ask this question that I am feeling my own pulse to see where the painful throbbing was before. Only to discover there is no painful throbbing. There is nothing but this: rain falling and me watching . All so simple. I never imagined that the world and I could reach this point of harmony. The rain is not falling because it needs me, and I am not watching because I need the rain. But we are linked together as intimately as water to rain. And I am not grateful for anything. Had I not been forced to take this path involuntarily the moment I was born, I should always have been

what I am now: a peasant woman in a field where it is raining. Thanking neither God nor nature. Even the rain does not give thanks. I am not some inanimate thing which is grateful for having been transformed into something else. I am a woman, I am a person, I am a body on the alert and watching from a window. Just as the rain is not grateful for not being a stone. Rain is rain. Perhaps this is what one might call being alive. Just this and nothing more: being alive. And simply to be alive brings some happiness.

RETURN TO NATURE (EXTRACT)

In Rio there was a place with an open hearth. And when she saw that it was not only cold but raining in the trees, she could not believe she had been given so much. The world awakening with something she did not even realize she needed, as if she were suffering from hunger. It was raining, raining. The flames wink at her and her man. He takes care of the things she takes for granted. He pokes the fire in the hearth as if it were his duty from birth. While she – who is ever restless and busying herself trying out this and that – never so much as remembers to poke the fire. That is not her job. After all, what does she have a man for? If he is a man, then let him carry out his mission. All she is prepared to do is to coax him: 'That piece of wood,' she tells him, 'still hasn't caught fire.' And before she can finish saying what she has to say, the man has seen the piece of wood for himself and is already poking at it. Not because she ordered him to, for she is the man's wife and he would lose his authority if she were to start giving him orders. His other hand, which is free, is within reach. She knows but does not take it. His hand is there for the taking if she so desires and that is all she asks.

Ah, to think all this will end! For it cannot last by itself. No, no, she is not referring to the fire, she is referring to what she feels. What she feels never lasts, what she feels always comes to an end, perhaps never to return. So she savours this moment, consumes its fire, and the sweet fire burns, burns and glows. Then she who knows that everything must end, reaches out and, as she takes the man's free hand in hers, she sweetly burns, burns and glows.

A DECLARATION OF LOVE

This is a confession of love: I love the Portuguese language. It is neither easy nor flexible. And never having been fashioned to accommodate concepts of any great depth, it tends to lack subtlety. It can also hit out at anyone foolish enough to try and transform it into a language of sentiment and awareness. Or a language of love. The Portuguese language offers a real challenge to any writer. Especially to any writer intent upon removing the surface layers from people and things.

Sometimes it reacts when confronted by some complicated process of thought. Sometimes it takes fright at the unpredictable nature of a sentence. I love manipulating it – just as I used to enjoy riding a horse and guiding it by the reins, one minute slowly, the next at a fast gallop.

I should like to extract as much as possible from the Portuguese language. And this is a desire shared by all writers. Camoens and his contemporaries, for all their achievements, did not succeed in fashioning our language for all time. Subsequent generations of writers go on injecting new life into the grave of thought.

These are the problems we face. But I have not spoken of the fascination of struggling with a language which has not been exploited in any great depth. What I have inherited from others is not enough.

If I were mute and unable to write and people were to ask me which language I should like to master, I would say English for its precision and beauty. But since I have not been born mute and I can write, it is absolutely clear to me that what I have really always wanted was to write in Portuguese. I should even have preferred not to have learnt other languages so as to keep my command of Portuguese fresh and pure.

THE THREE EXPERIENCES

There are three things for which I was born and for which I am prepared to give my life. I was born to love others and to raise children. To 'love others' is something so momentous that

it even includes forgiving myself with what love remains. And these three things are so momentous that life seems all too short for such a task. Time is passing and I must make haste. There is not a moment to lose. Loving others is the only form of individual salvation I know: no one who gives love will be lost and they may even receive love in return.

I was also born to write. The written word helps me to dominate the world. Ever since childhood, I have dreamed of pursuing various professions. One of these was writing. I do not know why, but I chose to become a writer. Perhaps because other professions would have required a longer apprenticeship, whilst the only training for a writer is life itself, living within ourselves and all around us. I have never found it easy to study. And in order to write, the only study required is the act of writing itself. I started writing at the age of seven in the hope that one day I should be able to master language. Yet each time I raise my pen it is as if I were about to write for the first time. Each book I write is a tortuous yet blissful début. This ability to renew myself as time passes is what I would call living and writing.

As for my children, their birth was no accident. I wanted to be a mother. My two sons were willingly conceived. My two sons are here beside me. I am proud of them, I renew myself in them and share their anxieties and woes. I give them everything I have to give. If I were not a mother, I should be alone in the world. But I have offspring and day by day I prepare to pass my name on to them. I know that the time will come when they must spread their wings for that inevitable flight and I shall be left alone. I say inevitable, because we do not conceive children for ourselves, we rear them for themselves. Once left on my own, I shall be following in the footsteps of all mothers.

I shall always have love. Writing is a great force in my life but it could betray and abandon me: one day I may feel that I have written my fair share in this world and that I must know when to stop. Writing brings no guarantees.

But as for loving, I can go on until I die. Love is unending. It is as if the world were awaiting me. And I go to meet what awaits me.

I pray God that I shall not live in the past. I prefer to live for the present and, however illusory, for something in the future.

Time races on, time is so short: I must make haste yet live this life of mine as if it were eternal. Then death will bring a certain splendour: dying will be one of the most solemn moments in

my life. I am afraid of dying. I do not know what nebulous regions or Milky Ways await me. I want to die giving emphasis to life and death.

I have only one request: at the hour of death let there be someone dear to me at my bedside to hold my hand. Then I shall feel no fear and have someone to accompany me during this solemn passage. I should like reincarnation: so that I might be reborn after death and be able to give my living soul to some new person. But I need some warning. If it is true that there is reincarnation, then my present life is not strictly mine: a soul has been given to my body. I wish to be reborn forever. And in the next incarnation I shall read my own books like any ordinary, interested reader, unaware that it was me who wrote them.

What I need is some warning or sign. Perhaps there will be some premonition. Or the sign will come upon opening a book. Or as I listen to music.

For one of the most solitary things I know is to be deprived of any premonition.

THE MASSACRE OF HUMAN BEINGS. THE INDIANS

First I must tell you about Noel Nutels before relating what he told me. Noel was the doctor appointed to accompany the Roncador-Xingu Expedition from 1944 to 1950; he held a similar post with the Organization for the Protection of Indians from 1951 to 1955 under the directorship of José Maria da Gama Malcher. When Malcher subsequently became Director of the Maurício de Medeiros Health Institute, Nutels set up the Mobile Health Unit, which now forms part of the National Health Service, for the treatment of tuberculosis, and known as SUSA, which he continues to administer. One of the main objectives of SUSA is to combat the disease in remote areas. Medical teams travel periodically into the interior to set up clinics among the indigenous population. Notable amongst these area projects is the National Xingu Park. This is a demarcated region of twenty-two thousand kilometres which covers practically the entire area of the River Xingu. There are some fifteen native tribes living in this area in conditions not unlike those encountered by the first settlers in Brazil. These tribes are classified as Tupi, Gê, Aruaque and Caribe. And these are not the only tribes settled within the Park and its immediate surroundings, where each tribe has its own language and is free to make contact with civilization or to remain in isolation. This is an area where Indians are not massacred. They are protected because the Park is run by the Vilas Boas brothers who have assimilated the humane policies of Rondon which they themselves have implemented in their work with Indian communities.

I asked Noel if there were any other factors which had prevented Indians from being killed in these compounds under their supervision. He explained that this area had been demarcated by Government decrees which prohibit any indiscriminate or unauthorized entry on the part of groups or individuals intent upon exploiting the Amazon region and its mineral resources.

But why this sudden wholesale massacre of Indians? And he replied: 'Indians have been killed in Brazil ever since the first settlers arrived.' If in 1500 there were nearly one and a half million natives, today, at most, there are some eighty thousand

Indians living in tribal conditions, and that is a generous estimate. Part of the indigenous population disappeared almost immediately because of the miscegenation with European culture which finally prevailed. The Indians were sacrificed by the colonizers in order to create vast estates and great cities.

As everyone knows, one of the major concerns of the Brazilian Constitution is the preservation of the Indian; constitutional clauses have been drawn up to ensure the Indian possession of the land he occupies. But the real irony is that precisely because of these constitutional measures Indians continue to be killed. Their lands are confiscated by greedy speculators. A statement by the Minister of Justice refers to the sale of an eighth of Brazilian territory to foreigners as one of the main factors contributing to this wholesale massacre of Indians. So we must ask ourselves whether the current wave of massacres is not a premeditated act of genocide. There are various ways of killing Indians: from simply shooting them to more subtle methods such as subverting Indian culture by religious indoctrination or by destroying their native customs and traditions. The Indians can also be wiped out by depriving them of the lands where they have their roots.

The only solution to the problem, in Noel's opinion, would be to create more protected compounds like the National Xingu Park. It would also make an enormous difference if IBRA (the Brazilian Institute of Agrarian Reform) were to speed up the implementation of its reforms in order to save what remains of the Indian communities. Until speculators are effectively discouraged from invading these remote territories, the Brazilian Indian will be in danger. Foreign adventurers will continue to drain our resources and impoverish our country; Indians will continue to be massacred and our national identity destroyed.

AS YOU SLEEP

There is something different about tonight. It is three o'clock in the morning. I am having one of my bouts of insomnia. I made myself some coffee since sleep seemed unlikely. I put in too much sugar and the coffee tasted horrid. I can hear the waves beating against the shore. Tonight is different because as you sleep I am talking to you. I break off, go out on to the terrace, look down on to the street, the long, narrow strip of beach and the sea. It is dark. So dark. I think of my favourite people: they

are all asleep or out enjoying themselves. Some of them might even be drinking whisky. My coffee tastes even sweeter and becomes quite undrinkable. The night turns darker. I am sinking into painless melancholy. It is not so bad. Only to be expected. Tomorrow I might experience some happiness, not exactly ecstasy, just happiness. And that is not so bad either. True, but I am scarcely enjoying my pact with humdrum existence.

STRICTLY FEMININE

A news item published on 17 May and sent to me by a friend, referred to me in unflattering terms. Under the headline: *Women Writers Convene at the Rio Festival, The Globe* reports that when Irene Tavares de Sá, one of the conference organizers, was asked why Clarice Lispector had been omitted from the list of participating authors, she replied:

– We deeply regret the absence of Clarice Lispector whom we were hoping would be present. When she turned down our initial invitation, we thought there had been some misunderstanding. So we decided to telephone in order to persuade Clarice Lispector to change her mind, but she flatly refused and made it clear that she had no interest in our conference.

Dear friends, that is a blatant lie. The organizers approached me once, and not twice, as they claim. Unless they telephoned the wrong number and some practical joker pretended to be me.

I received one telephone call and I explained *word for word* that 'I was sorry not to be able to accept their invitation because I would not be in Rio on that date'. So any suggestion that *I flatly refused* is indefensible.

There is another error of fact in the report. The list of authors who were to appear at the Festival included the name of Marly de Oliveira. Now this great poet, who is a close friend, had left for Buenos Aires more than a fortnight before the Festival was due to take place and she plans to stay there for several months. I would advise Dona Irene and her committee to exercise a little more care and discretion. I felt I owed this explanation to my readers.

WILD ROSES

Just to hear the expression *wild roses* makes me inhale the atmosphere as if the world were one enormous wild rose. I have a dear friend who occasionally sends me roses. And their perfume, dear God, encourages me to breathe and live.

Wild roses embody some strange yet delicate mystery; as they

begin to wither their perfume becomes stronger. Already close to death and turning yellow, their perfume becomes overpoweringly sweet and reminds me of perfumed moonlit nights in Recife. And once truly dead and withered – like flowers reborn in the Earth's cradle – their perfume leaves me inebriated. They are dead and ugly. No longer white, their leaves have turned brown. But how can I throw them out when their souls continue to live even after death? I solved this problem of the roses by stripping off the perfumed petals and scattering them amongst the clothes in my drawers.

The last time my friend sent me wild roses, they had no sooner started to wither and become more perfumed, than I said to my sons:

– That's how I should like to die: perfuming everything with love. Dead, yet still breathing with my living soul.

I forgot to mention that the wild roses come from a climbing plant and that several flowers bud on the same branch. Wild roses, I love you. And I die a little with every passing day because of your perfume.

NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is almost like hunger. It only passes once its presence has been consumed. But sometimes the nostalgia is so deep that it is barely present: it wants to absorb the other person completely. This desire for total union through the one becoming the other is one of the most compelling sentiments we experience in life.

MYSTERIOUS PHRASE, STRANGE DREAM

Sometimes whole phrases come to me, the subsequent results of earlier thoughts. These phrases are mysterious for, when they come to me, they are no longer linked to any source. For example, the following phrase suddenly came to me and could just as easily have been said by so many unhappy people: 'I wanted to give you bread to satisfy your hunger but you wanted gold. Yet your hunger is as great as your soul which you have reduced to the level of gold.'

Why these words which I myself have not lived? The only hypothesis that comes to mind, because of the word *gold*, comes from a dream a woman reader had about me. She wrote to me, signing her letter with the name Azalea, and we have since become close friends. She wrote: 'Do not be alarmed or frightened. The omens in my dream could not have been more favourable. In my dream I saw what looked like an immense flower-bed, with the soil turned over and piled up on each side. There were lots of people leaning forward or kneeling down beside the flower-bed. I recognized none of the people who were near me. Some of them it would have been impossible to recognize, for their heads were lowered as they dug and turned over the soil. They were searching for gold, Clarice. And finding it. Because in front of each of them a gleaming pile grew bigger and bigger and could only have been gold.

'Among that delirious crowd, there was someone digging whose face was very familiar: it was Clarice Lispector – whom, since first studying literature at college, I have always considered the best woman writer in the Portuguese language. That face was so well known to me that it was as if I were seeing a member of my own family. Anxiously, I watched you at work, as you dug frantically for gold.

'But unlike the others, all you had in front of you was a pile of gritty earth. There was no gold. The others were digging and happily separating the shining grains of metal, their piles steadily growing bigger. But not you. Each time you raked the soil with your hands in desperation, you brought out handfuls of hair, dark, filthy and disgusting. And you kept turning round

in despair, looking at me and showing me the result of your labours.

'Before resuming once more that mad, frantic excavating, your glances and gestures as you showed me your hands – empty and without even so much as a golden hair to show for your efforts – seemed to plead for help. I drew near and touched you on the shoulder. I begged you to come away. This was not for you. And the strangest thing of all is that I myself felt distressed, desperate and ill, as if I myself were Clarice Lispector. You listened to me, got to your feet and started to accompany me. We turned our backs on the crowd which carried on digging furiously and I led you away by the hand. It was then I sensed your reluctance. And you kept looking back as if sorry to be leaving that place, as if your last hope had been buried there. We walked for a little, hand in hand, and without speaking. You wept bitterly. Now and then you would break away from me and stand there staring at your empty hands, the palms outstretched before you. And you sobbed: "They're empty, Azalea!" I took your hands in mine again, afraid that you might go back to that desperate digging. And at that moment a man appeared from nowhere. Dressed all in gold, but obviously alive because he gave us a warm smile as he approached. He was a friend of yours, not mine. You called out his name and ran up to him. As you embraced I could no longer tell which of you was made of gold, you or the man. Both of you were resplendent and everything was bathed in a dazzling light. I woke up in a flood of tears. I told the family about my dream over breakfast. It was Sunday. My brother-in-law said: "Look, there ought to be an article by Clarice Lispector in today's *Jornal do Brasil*. I'll go out and buy you a copy." That is when I felt I had to speak to you. Either in writing or on the telephone. I simply had to get in touch with you. My brother-in-law returned and announced: "Her column appears on Saturdays." So I waited until the following Saturday (during the week I read another newspaper). And on a bright, sunny April morning with a nice, cool breeze, the *Jornal* brought Clarice into our home.'

Azalea did not simply write to me. Her letter was delivered by a sweet, young boy called Domenico, who also presented me with a bunch of white, wild roses. There is something very strange about those roses: as time passes and they begin to wither, the stronger their perfume. I telephoned Azalea and told her all this. She has promised to give me a cutting to plant here on my terrace so that the roses can climb up the railings and

perfume my life. (Speaking of their perfume has sent me into my bedroom to spray myself with *Scandale* by Lanvin. And being fair, I suspect my hair has turned the colour of gold as in Azalea's dream.)

I was intrigued by that dream and believe it to be symbolic. I must ask an acquaintance of mine – a psychoanalyst – the significance of gold and how he would interpret that phrase of mine about gold and bread. And to my delight, I have just remembered that bread has the richness of wheat.

ONE WOMAN TOO MANY

I was once invited to contribute to a series of articles which were to be written by women for women. Fortunately, the series never got off the ground. I say fortunately, because I suspect the series would have been restricted to *feminism* and *feminist themes*, in the sense accepted by most men and even by most women who have resigned themselves: as if women belonged to some closed circle segregated from the rest of society. But my misgivings about the series were aroused when I recalled an interview with a girl from some newspaper or other who wanted to discuss literature. Yet within minutes we were discussing the best brand of eye-liner. And I am sure I was to blame. Eye make-up is also a subject of some importance, but I was not trying to upstage the specialists, however tempting it may be to chat about the latest fashions and our precious, ephemeral beauty.

AND TOMORROW IS SUNDAY

Enjoy your Sunday. Monday is the most difficult day of the week because one is always attempting to make a fresh start. Every Sunday at midnight we celebrate a modest *réveillon*, because although Sunday night may not be New Year's Eve, it is the start of a new week which means making plans and weaving dreams. My plans for the coming week consist of finally putting my papers in order, before someone else has to do it for me. As for my dreams, you must forgive me, but those I keep to myself, just as you, with the thoughtful expression of someone who knows their rights, keep yours to yourself.

A BOURGEOIS IDEAL

How does an untidy person become tidy? My papers are in disorder, my drawers need sorting out. (I must have a secretary because I am suffering from nervous exhaustion, according to my doctor.) This would not matter so much in my opinion if I

had some inner order. But people who are over-preoccupied with external order are precisely those who are suffering from inner disorder and need some counter-balance to give them some reassurance. I need reassurance and this could be achieved if my drawers were to be put into some kind of order. Well, merely thinking of tidying out those drawers made me feel weary and lazy. The laziness that comes at weekends. I hope my laziness will strike a chord in some of my male and female readers so that they will not feel too superior. Frankly, when it comes to tidiness, what I should like is for someone to take it upon themselves to provide me with some semblance of order. My absurd idea of luxury would be for some sort of governess-cum-secretary to take care of my external life, even to the extent of going to certain parties and receptions on my behalf. Naturally, this person would have to adore me – but with the utmost discretion, because naked worship is more than I can bear. It is inhibiting and kills any spontaneity. It deprives us of our right to have those faults, innate or acquired, which we jealously hold on to for support, because it is not only our virtues which serve as crutches.

What else could this governess-cum-secretary do for me? She should not look at me too often so as not to embarrass me. She should speak to me quite naturally but also know when to be silent and leave me in peace. She should decide what to prepare for lunch and dinner – then meals would be a constant and pleasant surprise. And, of course, she would keep my papers in order. She would also understand my moments of sadness but be sufficiently discreet not to show that she had understood. And naturally, I would expect her to reply on my behalf to publishers with tact and diplomacy. As for my children, I myself would take care of them. But she could act as a surrogate mother whenever I want to work or go to the cinema. A surrogate mother has the advantage of not embarrassing children with too much affection. As children grow up, their mother has to become smaller. Alas, mothers tend to go on being enormous. If my sons ever read this, they will be amused. When mothers of Russian descent start to kiss their children, instead of being content with one kiss they want to give them forty. I tried to explain this to one of my sons but he told me I was just looking for an excuse to justify all those kisses.

BELONGING

A friend of mine who is a doctor has assured me that right from the cradle, children sense their surroundings, and want things. Right from the cradle the human being has started to exist.

I am certain that right from the cradle my first desire was to belong. For reasons of no importance here, I must have somehow felt that I did not belong to anything or anyone. That my birth was superfluous.

If I first experienced this human hunger in the cradle, it continues to accompany me throughout life, as if predestined. So that I feel pangs of envy and desire whenever I see a nun: for she belongs to God.

Precisely because of this deep longing to give myself to something or someone, I have become rather aloof: I am afraid of revealing how much I need and how poor I am. Yes, poor. Very poor. All I possess is a body and a soul. And I need something more. Perhaps I started writing so early in life because, at least by writing, I belonged to myself to some extent. Which is a pale imitation.

Over the years, especially of late, I have lost the knack of being like other people. I no longer know how it is done. And a whole new kind of 'solitude through not belonging' has started to smother me like ivy on a wall.

If I have always wanted to belong, why then have I never joined any club or association? Because that is not what I mean by belonging. What I want and cannot achieve, is to be able to give the best of myself to whomever or whatever I might belong. Even my moments of happiness can be so solitary at times. And solitary moments of happiness can be so moving. It is like holding a gift in your hands, beautifully wrapped, but with no one to whom you can say: Here, this is for you, open it! Not wishing to find myself in moving situations and somewhat inhibited and reluctant to strike a tragic note, I rarely parcel up my feelings in gift wrapping.

Belonging does not simply come from being weak and needing to unite oneself to something or someone stronger. An intense desire to belong often comes from my own inner strength – I

wish to belong so that my strength will not be useless and may serve to strengthen some other person or thing.

But I do get some satisfaction out of life: for example, I belong to my country and, like millions of others, I belong to Brazil in the sense that I am Brazilian. And I, who in all sincerity have never desired or could desire fame – I am far too much the individualist to tolerate any invasion of my privacy – I, who do not seek fame, nevertheless enjoy being associated with Brazilian literature. No, no, not out of pride or ambition. I am happy to be associated with Brazilian literature for reasons which have nothing to do with literature, for I am not even what might be called a bluestocking or intellectual. I am happy simply 'to participate'.

I can almost visualize myself in the cradle, I can almost recreate inside me that vague yet pressing need to belong. For reasons which not even my father or mother could control, I was born and remain: simply born.

Yet my birth was planned in such a pleasing way. My mother was in poor health and there was a well-known superstition which claimed that a woman could be cured of illness if she gave birth to a son. So I was deliberately conceived: with love and hope. Only I failed to cure my mother. And to this day I carry this burden of guilt: my parents conceived me for a specific mission and I failed them. As if they had been relying on me to defend the trenches in time of war and I had deserted my post. I know my parents forgave me my useless birth and forgot that I had frustrated their great hopes. But I have not forgiven myself or forgotten. I wanted to work a miracle: to be born and cure my mother. Then I should truly have belonged to my father and mother. I could not even confide my *solitude of not belonging* because, as a deserter, I kept the secret of my escape which shame forbade me to reveal.

Life has allowed me to belong now and then, as if to give me the measure of what I am losing by not belonging. And then I discovered that: *to belong is to live*. I experienced it with the thirst of someone in the desert who avidly drinks the last drops of water from a flask. And then my thirst returns and I find myself walking that same desert.

AWAITING AN ANSWER

I no longer know how to write. I have lost the knack. But I have seen many things in this world. One of the saddest has been to see mouths open to speak or perhaps simply to stutter in vain. Therefore I sometimes feel like writing what they were unable to express. I no longer know how to write but the literary aspect has become so unimportant in my life that not being able to write may be precisely what will save me from literature. So what has become important to me? Whatever it may be, it will probably manifest itself through literature.

AN EXPERIENCE

Perhaps this is one of the most important experiences known to man and beast. The need to seek someone's help and receive it, out of sheer generosity and understanding. Perhaps it is worth being born in order to make a silent plea and be heard. I have pleaded for help. And received it.

I then felt like a dangerous tiger with an arrow stuck in its flesh, a tiger circling the terrified onlookers to discover who had inflicted this terrible pain. Until someone sensed that a wounded beast is no more dangerous than a child. Bravely approaching the tiger, the stranger carefully removed the arrow.

And the tiger? Certain things defy words of gratitude from humans and animals. So I, the tiger, slowly circled several times in front of my Good Samaritan, paused, and licked my paws, before withdrawing in silence, since words are unimportant.

THE COLUMNIST

I know I am not a columnist, but I have given some thought to this matter. I really ought to consult Rubem Braga since he was responsible for inventing the newspaper column here in Brazil. But let me see if I can probe this matter on my own, in order to clarify the genre.

What is a column? Is it a narrative, a dialogue, a résumé of one's state of mind? I really cannot say, because before starting to write for the *Jornal do Brasil*, all I had ever published were novels and short stories. No sooner had I agreed to write a weekly column than I almost died of fright. A close friend of mine who has a firm, persuasive, yet endearing voice, practically ordered me not to be afraid. He advised me: 'Write whatever comes into your head, however nonsensical, for you have already written serious books and your readers will understand that your weekly column is an honest attempt to make some money.' But I was anxious to do a good job for a newspaper as reputable as the *Jornal* and had no desire to write nonsense. Any nonsense I have ever written, and I dare say I have written a great deal in my time, was quite unintentional.

Nor was it my intention to become so intimate with the readers of my weekly column. Very soon I will find myself narrating my past and present, and nothing could be further from my thoughts. I have noticed something else. Once I know I am writing for a newspaper which is widely read, unlike a book which will only be read by those who are interested in literature, then my style automatically changes. Not that I mind changing my style. On the contrary. But I should prefer any changes to be more radical and deeply felt so that they might be reflected in the writing. But to change one's style for a weekly column? To write in a *lighter vein* simply to please the general reader? To be entertaining and provide a few moments of distraction? And there is another thing: when I write a book I try to communicate in depth with myself and with my reader. Here in the newspaper, I simply chat to my readers and I am delighted to find that they are satisfied. But to be honest, I am far from satisfied. I really must consult Rubem Braga otherwise I shall never begin to understand this matter.

DISCOVERING THE WORLD

What I wish to narrate is as delicate as life itself. And I should like to draw on the delicate side of my nature as well as that peasant streak which is my salvation.

In my childhood and subsequent adolescence I was precocious in many things. In absorbing atmosphere, for example, or in sensing someone's intimate aura. Yet in other important matters I was far from being precocious and incredibly backward. And I am still ignorant about so many things. What am I to do? There appears to be something childish in my nature which refuses to grow up.

Even beyond the age of thirteen, for example, I was still unaware of what Americans call *the facts of life*. The expression refers to that deep sexual relationship between a man and a woman which produces children. Or could it be that I had some vague perception of these facts which I deliberately suppressed in order to hide my embarrassment and go on being innocent and attractive to little boys? Being attractive at the age of eleven meant scrubbing my face until it shone. Then I felt prepared. Could my ignorance have been some foolish and senseless attempt to remain ingenuous in order to go on thinking about little boys without feeling guilty? Most likely. For I have always known about things without even being aware that I know them.

My friends at school knew about everything and even exchanged anecdotes about the things they knew. Completely bewildered, I would pretend that I understood rather than have them despising me for being so ignorant.

Yet for all my ignorance of the facts, I instinctively went on flirting with any boy who took my fancy. Instinct had outstripped my intelligence.

Until I became thirteen and felt sufficiently grown-up to discover facts which might shock me. I told a close friend about my guilty secret: I knew nothing about the things the other girls discussed, and had only pretended to understand. She was flabbergasted. My pretence had been so convincing. But I finally persuaded her I was telling the truth and she decided without further ado to unravel life's mysteries. Unfortunately she was

also in her early teens and incapable of explaining things without causing me acute embarrassment. I stood there, paralysed, staring at her, my innocence mortally wounded, my emotions in turmoil, and overcome with bewilderment, fright and indignation. Mentally, I babbled to myself: But why? For what reason? The shock was so great – and traumatic for several weeks – that there and then on the street-corner I swore I would never marry.

Although some months later, I had forgotten my oath and resumed my little flirtations.

And as time passed, I was no longer shocked at the way men and women make love. I even came to find it quite perfect. And extremely delicate. By then I had already become a tall girl, pensive by nature and rebellious. Yet for all my wildness, I was still very shy.

Before coming to terms with the ritual of life, I experienced much suffering which I might have been spared if some responsible adult had taken the trouble to tell me about love. That person would have known how to cope with my ingenuous nature without offending my sensibilities, without obliging me to be born anew in order to accept life and its mysteries.

For the greatest surprise of all was to find that, after discovering everything, the mystery remained intact. I know flowers grow from a plant yet I go on being surprised by nature's secret paths. And if I feel somewhat embarrassed to this day by the facts of life, it is not because I find them shameful, but simply out of feminine discretion.

For I am convinced that life is beautiful.

THE ELECTRONIC BRAIN

I really must consult a doctor and see what can be done to improve my memory. A friend has already given me two bottles of red pills to help me remember things but my memory is so bad that I forget to take them. This may sound like a tall story but it happens to be true.

I am telling you all this because I simply cannot remember who told me about the electronic brain. What is more, I am holding at this very moment a paper tape punched with little square holes and this same tape is the electronic brain's memory. The electronic brain: this computing machine saves us a great deal of trouble. Personal or factual details are *registered* in the language of the computer (holes punched on cards or tapes). From here they pass to the computer's *memory*. This is another computing instrument (or machine) where the data is stored until required.

Departing from this principle, we arrive at the electronic design. Starting with a design made on *magnetic* paper, the machine (or brain), can reproduce the design in material form. That is to say, the design goes in and the object comes out (cybernetics, etc). There is a plastic or visual experience as well as the literary experience of *reproduction* (number and quality). One feels that this invention gives mankind a *helping hand*. The compensation of error. It offers us the possibility of coping with a machine and its sensory organs as we would like to cope with our brain (and its sensory organs) independent of ourselves and functioning to perfection.

Now then I have said everything, truly everything I know about the electronic brain. No doubt I have made a number of blunders and left out a number of things which would have helped to explain the process more clearly.

I hope those readers who understand these things better than I do will write to me explaining more fully how the electronic brain works. But I also beg of them to use a *layman's terms* as far as possible, so that not only will I understand the details but also be able to pass them successfully to my readers.

When I think that I have managed to write about the mystery

of the electronic brain, which remains a mystery, I can only exclaim like the folk up there in my native Recife: Holy Mother of God!...

But then love is more mysterious than the electronic brain and I have often written about love. Just as I timidly but courageously dare to write about the world.

MY OWN MYSTERY

I am so mysterious that I do not understand myself.

A PSYCHOANALYST'S DIAGNOSIS

As it happens, I have several women friends who have been treated at some time or other by Dr Lourival Coimbra, a psychoanalyst who works at the Melanie Klein Institute. Friends and acquaintances tell me they have discussed me with Dr Coimbra. And I can just imagine how sick and tired he must be of hearing my name. Recently, one of his patients visited me and I decided to recompense the poor man for listening to all those boring details about me by sending him a copy of my book of short stories entitled *Laços de Família* [Family Ties]. In the dedication I apologized for my handwriting which has got much worse since I burned my right hand in a fire.

Several days later my friend paid me another visit, and over coffee I asked her if she had given the book to Dr Lourival. She said she had and, on reading the dedication, he had passed a comment. I was intrigued and anxious to know what he had said. She told me that on reading the dedication, Dr Lourival had remarked: 'Clarice gives so much to others, yet begs to be allowed to exist.'

Yes, Dr Lourival. I humbly beg to be allowed to exist, I humbly implore happiness, an act of grace; I beg to be allowed to live with less suffering, I ask to be spared so many cruel experiences, I ask both men and women to think of me as a human being worthy of some love and respect. I beseech life's blessing.

A KEPT WOMAN

She had been brought up in the manor house since childhood. She could distract and amuse herself at the slightest thing, without so much as a smile. She was not cheerful. She would slouch around, with gaping mouth and staring eyes. When the mistress of the house lost her patience, she would call her an imbecile. Rumour had it that she was any man's for the asking. She was not happy but she was pregnant. Her employers, who were sick and tired of farming out her illegitimate children to families in the neighbourhood, abused and insulted her. They used no violence because they did not believe in violence. But when she sat down to eat, they would mutter aloud: 'Of course, she's eating for two.' They bullied her, insisting she should get on with her work and cynically warned her: 'Don't you go having that baby before it's due! We've already found a home for it!' She did not take offence. Her body started swelling and she looked more and more yellow beneath that mulatto complexion. What her employers could not forgive was that this time the father was a 'dirty nigger', as if they had chosen someone for her who was less dirty and lighter-skinned. Sometimes as she passed with a tray in her arms, they would study her attentively and say in veiled tones, because the grandchildren were present: 'A dirty nigger if you please.' One day her mind seemed to be clear and she said aloud: 'But I was with him only three times!' The children were highly amused, but their grandparents were furious at her impudence and ordered her to leave the room. To make matters worse, she tripped on the rug and fell on top of the tray. But she was not a slave like the other housemaid. The other housemaid, who came from the house in Laranjeiras, had to look after the children and take care of the laundry: a real slave. But not her. She was no slave. She lived independently and gave birth to her own children who were soon handed round like unwanted kittens, looking as yellow as their mother.

Two years later, I met her in the street and she quietly confided with some embarrassment that she was living with a Portuguese gentleman. 'I'm expecting him to appear at any moment,' she told me, leaning against a lamp-post. He finally came round the

corner: a fat old man on his last legs, otherwise she would have been pregnant again. 'He's very good to me,' she said, as if trying to explain. The old man kept his distance but heard her remark. He lowered his eyes as if to conceal who knows what.

A CONFERENCE IN TEXAS

When I was invited with other Latin American writers to attend a conference at the University of Texas, I prepared my paper as best I could, having pointed out beforehand that I was not the ideal person to be discussing 'literature'...leaving aside the fact that I have neither the inclination nor patience to sit down and analyse texts in detail. Nor have I been able to keep up with the literary trends and experiments which have proliferated both here in Brazil and abroad during recent years. After all, I have never cultivated what one might truly call an 'intellectual life'. More serious still: notwithstanding my lack of intellectual pursuits, I might at least have shown some interest in problems relating to literature. But even those I have ignored. I have been writing for as long as I can remember, yet I have never thought about literature the other way round, that is to say, in the abstract. For me 'literature' is the term used by others to describe what we writers do. And to have to think of my books as literature is a new experience and perhaps not all that profitable. At first the idea did not appeal to me. It was rather like referring to oneself as Antonio or Maria. Then the experience seemed less daunting: to refer to yourself by the name others call you, sounds like a summons to enlist. The moment I called out my name, I felt I had been enlisted, as if by magic. Yes, enlisted, but very confused.

'This is the first time I have lectured abroad but I could not resist the challenge of trying something new. And I hope this will not prejudice what I have to say about Brazilian literature. There is no reason why this small contribution of mine should not bring me some profit and pleasure. After all, someone ought to benefit. Lacking the authority of scholars and critics, all I can hope to offer are my personal views about Brazilian writers, so I fear that, apart from giving you a superficial outline, any profit is likely to be entirely mine. All I can hope to do in this short paper, apart from giving you some factual information, is "to open an open door". Except that for me that door has always been closed...'

It is not by chance that I understand those who are trying to find their path in life. How I struggled to find mine! And how I go on relentlessly searching for the better part of my nature, anxiously looking for a short cut, since I no longer dare speak of a path. I who had wanted that PATH in capital letters. I frantically keep searching for a path to follow without any obstacles. But so far I have failed to find any short cut with cool shadows and reflected light among the trees, where I might be myself at long last. But one thing is certain: I am not my path. My path is someone else, my path is others. When I can fully sense another's presence, I will be safe and think to myself: here is my port of call.

RITUAL (EXTRACT)

Beyond lies the sea, the most mysterious of non-human existences. While the woman stands here on the shore, the most mysterious of living creatures. The day mankind questioned its own nature, it became the most enigmatic of living creatures. The woman and the sea.

Their mysteries could only come together if the one were to surrender to the other: the surrender of two incomprehensible worlds enacted with the confidence of two understandings surrendering to each other.

She is capable of looking at the sea. Her vision is only restricted by the line on the horizon, that is to say, by her human incapacity to see beyond the Earth's curve.

It is six o'clock in the morning. There is nothing to be seen on the shore except a stray dog, a black dog which stops in its tracks. Why is a dog so free? Because the dog is that living mystery which does not question itself. The woman hesitates before entering the sea.

Her body consoles itself with its own smallness in relation to the sea's vastness, because the body's smallness helps to keep it warm. This same smallness also turns the human body into something poor but free with its share of that freedom enjoyed by the dog on the sands. This body will enter the infinite chill that roars without ire in the evening silence. Unwittingly, the woman is testing her courage. The shore is deserted at this early hour so there are no other bathers to show her how entering the sea can be transformed into a frivolous game of life. She is alone. The salt-water is not alone because it is salt and fathomless, and that is an achievement. At this moment she is less familiar with herself than with the sea. Her courage is that of someone who, without knowing herself, nevertheless proceeds. It is fatal not to know oneself, and not to know oneself requires courage.

She starts to enter the sea. The salt-water is so cold it chills her legs as if part of the ritual. But a fatal happiness – happiness is fatal – has already possessed her although it never occurs to her to smile. On the contrary, she looks quite solemn. The powerful smell from those tossing waves rouses her from the slumbering

depths of millennial dreams. She now becomes watchful, just as the hunter is unconsciously watchful. The woman has become impenetrable, light, and sharp, as she forces her way into the cold sea, liquid yet resistant, before allowing her to enter, just as in loving where resistance is often an act of pleading.

This slow passage increases her inner courage. And suddenly she allows herself to be immersed by the first wave. The salt and iodine, completely liquid, momentarily blind her, the water drenching her – as she stands there in terror and already fertile.

The cold becomes intense. Advancing, she penetrates the sea. She has found her courage. The familiar ritual is under way. She lowers her head into the gleaming waters and re-emerges, her hair dripping salt-water which causes her eyes to smart. Slowly she splashes the water with one hand. Her hair soon dries in the sun, the salt making it brittle. Cupping her hands to form a shell, she drinks the water in great, refreshing gulps, a time-honoured ritual which she performs with the arrogance of those who never offer explanations, not even to themselves.

This was what she needed: to feel the sea inside her like a man's dense sperm. Now she is truly equal to herself. Her nourished throat becomes parched with salt, her eyes redden as the salt dries in the sun, the gentle waves come beating against her and then retreat, her body acting as a solid shield.

She plunges in once more, swallows more water, now less avid and intense, for her thirst has been slaked. She is the lover who knows she will possess everything anew. The sun comes out further and causes her to shiver even as it dries her. She takes another plunge, ever less avid and intense. Now she knows what she wants. She wants to remain standing still in the water. And that is precisely what she does. As if beating against the side of a ship, the waves come beating against her, retract and return. There is no transmission. The woman needs no communication.

She then walks through the sea, heading for the shore. She is not walking over the waters – that she would never do, thousands of years after those waters have already been walked over – but no one can rob her of this: to be able to walk through the sea. Sometimes the waves put up resistance, pushing her back with force, whereupon the woman, like a ship's figurehead, presses on, a little more determined and severe.

Now she is treading the sands. Aware that she is gleaming with water, salt and sun. Even if she were to forget within

minutes, all this will be hers forever. And she knows in some obscure way that her dripping hair belongs to someone who has been shipwrecked. Because she knows – she knows she has survived danger. A danger as ancient as man himself.

HOW TO TREAT ONE'S POSSESSIONS

There is a creature living inside me as if he were at home, and he is. He is a black horse with a shiny coat and although completely wild – for he has never lived inside anyone before nor ever been saddled – although completely wild, this gives him that primitive sweetness of a creature without fear. His nose is moist and fresh. I love kissing that nose. When I die, the black horse will be homeless and suffer a great deal. Unless he can find another home where no one will be afraid of this creature who can be savage and at the same time so gentle. I must warn you that the horse is nameless: you need only call him in order to discover his name. Or perhaps you will not discover it, but once called with tenderness and authority, he comes. If his sense of smell tells him that a body is free, he comes trotting up quietly. But I should warn you not to be afraid when he neighs: you could easily be deceived into thinking some human being is giving voice to pleasure or wrath.

A CHALLENGE FOR THE PSYCHOANALYSTS

I dreamed that a fish was taking its clothes off and remained naked.

A FRIENDLY WORD OF ADVICE

'Fortify what is best in you. Pay no attention to the opinion of others. Be guided by yourself and your own Ego. Once your Ego is sufficiently fortified it will awaken, and things you have never dreamt of will be *revealed* to you.'

MICHELANGELO

Ten years before his death, Michelangelo dedicated a sonnet (LXV) to Giorgio Vasari entitled: *On the Threshold of Death.*

Already now my life has run its course,
And, like a fragile boat on a rough sea,
I reach the place where everyone must cross
And give account of life's activity.

Now I know well it was a fantasy
That made me think art could be made into
An idol or a king. Though all men do
This, they do it half-unwillingly.

The loving thoughts, so happy and so vain,
Are finished now. A double death comes near –
The one is sure, the other is a threat.

Painting and sculpture cannot any more
Quieten the soul that turns to God again,
To God who, on the cross, for us was set.

[Translated by Elizabeth Jennings]

THE SWEATER

Someone gave me a sweater. That seems simple enough. But it is not.

The sweater was sent to me by a girl I did not know. I discovered through a mutual friend that she is a designer of considerable talent. She lives in São Paulo. On a visit to Rio, she had lunch with him. She arrived wearing a very pretty sweater and my friend, thinking it would look good on me, ordered one in exactly the same pattern. The girl happens to be one of my readers – or am I mistaken? And when she discovered who the present was for, she insisted on buying it for me herself. Our mutual friend agreed.

So here I am, the proud owner of the prettiest sweater you ever saw. It is a bright cherry red and seems to embody all that is good for both of us. That warm red is the colour of the sweater's soul. I am writing these lines before going out, wearing my new sweater. The colour of fire and flame, it has been given to me with such affection that its warmth embraces me and keeps out the chill of solitude. It is like being caressed in deep friendship. Today I am wearing it in public for the first time. The sweater

is ever so slightly tight, but perhaps that is how it is meant to be worn: proudly flaunting the glorious state of womanhood. The moment I have stopped writing, I shall spray myself with my favourite perfume. My little secret. I adore secrets. And then I shall be ready to face the wintry cold outside: the real cold as well as those other chills we experience.

I am just another woman too many.

A REMARKABLE LOVE STORY

There once lived a girl who spent so much time observing hens that she came to understand their souls and deep anxieties. The hen is anxious, unlike the cockerel who suffers from an almost human anguish: he is deprived of any true love from his harem. Besides, he has to keep watch all night long, awaiting the first glimmer of dawn in the distant sky before singing those sonorous notes. That is his duty and art. But coming back to the hens, the girl kept two of them as pets. One was called Pedrina: the other Petronilla.

Whenever the girl suspected one of them might have a liver infection, she would sniff under its wings as if she were a trained nurse. She believed this was the first symptom of any illness, because the stench from a live hen is no joke. She would then ask her aunt for some medicine. Only to be told: 'But there's nothing wrong with your liver.' Feeling she could confide in her favourite aunt, the girl explained why she needed the medicine. She also felt it wise to administer equal doses to Pedrina and Petronilla in order to prevent any contagion. There was really no point in giving them any medicine because Pedrina and Petronilla continued to spend the whole day pecking away at the soil and eating all sorts of rubbish likely to harm their livers. And the stench under their wings was something awful. It never occurred to the girl to try using deodorant because where she lived in Minas Gerais people did not use deodorants and their underwear was made of linen rather than nylon. Her aunt continued to give her the medicine, a dark brown liquid which the girl suspected might be water coloured with a few drops of strong coffee – and then there was the awkward business of forcing open their beaks in order to administer the medicine that would finally cure them of being hens. The girl was too young to understand that humans cannot be cured of being humans or hens of being hens: humans, like hens, have their failures and triumphs (the hen's triumph is to be able to lay a perfect egg), something inherent in the species. The girl lived in the heart of the countryside and there was no chemist in the neighbourhood.

There was a further crisis when the girl discovered how thin Pedrina and Petronilla had become under their ruffled feathers, despite the fact that they never stopped eating all day long. The girl had not yet realized that to fatten them up would only hasten their destiny which was to be killed and eaten. And she went on struggling to open their beaks. She could soon sense every little thing about the hens in that great farmyard in Minas Gerais. And when she grew up, she was surprised to learn that the word *hen* or *chicken* in the local jargon also meant *coward*. The irony of the situation escaped her:

– 'But it's the cockerel who is the nervous creature as he goes chasing after the hens! The hens give no bother! But the cockerel moves so quickly he can scarcely be seen! He is forever trying to find a hen to love him! Without success!'

One day the little girl's mother decided to take her to spend the day at a relative's house which was some distance away. And when she returned home, the hen whom she had known in life as Petronilla no longer existed. Her aunt told her:

– 'We've eaten Petronilla.'

The little girl had an enormous capacity for love: the hen had never reciprocated that love, yet she had gone on loving it without hoping for anything in return. When she learned what had happened to Petronilla she began to loathe everyone at home, everyone except the mother who did not eat poultry and the servants who preferred beef. But she could scarcely bear to look at her father, for he was particularly fond of eating chicken. Her mother realized what was happening and tried to explain:

– 'When humans eat animals, those animals become more like people because they become part of us. We are the only two people here in the house who did not eat Petronilla. More's the pity!'

Pedrina, whom the little girl had always secretly preferred, died a natural death, for she had always been a delicate creature. When the little girl found Pedrina trembling under the blazing sun, she wrapped her up carefully in a dark-coloured towel and then sat her on top of one of those large tiled stoves to be found in all the old farm-houses in Minas Gerais. Everyone warned her that Pedrina was close to death but the little girl was stubborn and insisted on settling Pedrina, all wrapped up, on top of the warm tiles. Next morning Pedrina was a stiff corpse. Weeping bitterly, the little girl was finally convinced that death had claimed her beloved pet hen.

The years passed and she adopted another hen called Eponina.

This time, her love for Eponina was more down-to-earth and less romantic: the love of someone who had already suffered for love. And when the time came for Eponina to be killed and eaten, the little girl accepted the news as the inevitable destiny of any creature born a hen. The hen appears to have some premonition of its own destiny and therefore learns not to love its owners or the cockerel. A hen is alone in this world.

But the little girl had not forgotten what her mother had told her about eating animals one loved: she ate more of Eponina than the rest of the family. She ate without feeling hungry, but with an almost physical satisfaction because she now knew that Eponina would become part of her and be more hers than when she was alive. The cook had prepared Eponina in a traditional brown sauce or *molho pardo*, made with the blood and some vinegar. And so the little girl went through the pagan ritual which has been handed down throughout the ages, partaking of flesh and drinking blood. During dinner, she felt almost resentful of the others who were eating Eponina. The little girl was made for love: eventually she became a young woman and men entered her life.

THE DEATH OF A WHALE

The news spread within minutes: a whale had been carried in by the tide at Leme and another at Leblon and they were struggling to get back out to sea without success. They were young animals but they seemed colossal. People flocked from everywhere to take a look. I stayed at home. It was rumoured that one of the whales had been struggling for life for eight hours and, despite strenuous efforts to refloat her, the whale continued to suffer agonies without dying.

This news horrified me. It might not be entirely true but speculation was rife and there was no denying the truth of this extraordinary occurrence. Our craving for a better life means that we are always waiting for something extraordinary to happen which might relieve our frustrations. Had it been a man who was suffering on the beach for eight hours, we would have canonized him, such is our need to believe in the impossible.

No, I did not go to look for myself; I loathe death. God, what can you promise us in exchange for dying? For we already know heaven and hell. As if in a dream, each one of us has secretly experienced something of our own apocalypse. And our own death.

Apart from those moments when I almost died forever, how often in human silence – which is the most solemn silence of all in the animal kingdom – how often in human silence my agonizing soul awaited a death which never came. And as if in mockery – because contrary to the martyrdom of my bleeding soul – this body of mine truly thrived. As if my body needed to conceal my inner death from the world for this even more secret death. I have died many deaths and I shall conceal them until my body dies, causing someone to observe: this woman, this woman has lived.

Because one can truly say of the person who has experienced martyrdom: yes, this one, this one has lived.

The strangest thing is that whenever my body alone was close to death, my soul ignored it: the last time my body almost died, oblivious to what was happening my soul experienced a rare happiness as if finally liberated, while my body suffered the

agonies of hell. On one occasion, as I discovered only later, I had hovered for three days between life and death, and the doctors could not promise to save me. Unaware of what was happening, I could not understand why visitors were not allowed. But I must have visitors, I insisted, to distract me and help me forget this terrible pain. Refusing to obey the large placard marked *Silence*, I received visits, as if at a party, from my friends who found me moaning with pain. I could not stop talking and my voice was loud and clear: my soul was flowering like a spiky cactus. Until one of the doctors lost his patience and finally warned me: one more visitor and I shall discharge you even in your present condition. I had no idea what 'my present condition' might be. Not even for a moment during all these days in hospital did it occur to me that I might be close to death. I probably felt that so long as I was suffering so much pain, that in itself was sufficient proof that I was alive and well.

I can remember once watching a red sunset which seemed never ending. As I watched, I agonized with it and died. And night descended, swathing me in mystery and clairvoyant insomnia until I finally fell into a deep sleep from sheer exhaustion, thus completing my death. And when I woke up, I was gently surprised. During those first moments of wakefulness I thought to myself: Does one remain conscious after death? Until my body from force of habit made a gesture which was so unmistakably mine: that habit of running my fingers through my hair. Then with alarm, I realized that my body and soul had survived. All this – the certainty of being dead and discovering I was alive – all this probably lasted for no more than two brief seconds, perhaps even less. But I can now assure everyone, without fear of lying, that in less than two seconds one can experience life and death and another life beyond that. As a rough estimate of time, those two brief seconds constitute the difference between human and animal existence: just as God probably calculates time in fractions of a century of centuries, each century the equivalent of a second. God may even calculate our lives in terms of two seconds: one to live, the other to die. And the interval between them, my God, is perhaps Man's greatest creation: life, a life. A friend recently read me a quotation from one of the apostles addressing mankind: 'You are gods'.

Yes, I swear we are gods. For I, too, have often died of happiness during my life. And when this glorious and gentle death passed, I was surprised to find the world still going on around

me, to find that each thing had its own discipline, starting with myself. For I possessed a name and had already entered my own routine. Time appeared to have stopped and people had suddenly become immobilized whilst making some gesture, while I had experienced death through happiness.

I did not go to see the whale which was dying almost on my doorstep. Death, how I loathe you.

In the meantime, conflicting rumours were circulating in Leme. Some claimed the whale in Leblon was still alive but that its flesh was already being hacked to pieces and sold by the kilo because whale meat tastes delicious and is cheap. That was what people were saying in Leme. And I thought to myself: a curse on anyone who eats that meat out of curiosity. The only people who could be forgiven for eating that living flesh were the starving poor.

Horror-stricken, others reported that the whale in Leme, although still alive and struggling for breath, was also being cut up into kilos and sold. It seems incredible that anyone should devour another living creature before it is actually dead. I find it difficult to believe that anyone could show such disrespect for life and death, such contempt for creation, that they should gorge themselves on a creature in its death throes just because the meat is delicious and cheap; just because of human greed, just because we are as ferocious as any wild beast, just because we want to devour a whale, that mountain of innocence, in the same way as we devour the warbling innocence of a bird. This causes me such deep revulsion that I would rather die than live in this way.

Well, that is not entirely true. I am a savage among savage human beings. We are like monkeys imitating ourselves, monkeys who dreamed of becoming human, and this, too, constitutes our greatness. We shall never attain the humanity struggling inside us. The search and effort will go on forever. And it is only right that those who achieve that near impossible ideal of becoming human should be sanctified.

Because to give up our animal nature is no mean sacrifice.

NIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN

It is so vast. So desolate. Night in Spain has the perfume and harsh sound of *zapateado*, night in Italy has the warmth of the sea, however remote. Night here in Berne is silent.

I try in vain to work in order not to hear that silence, to think quickly in order to shut it out. Or to draw up a plan, to build that fragile bridge which barely links us to a suddenly improbable tomorrow. How can we overcome this tranquillity which is spying on us? A silence so great that our despair is shameful. Mountains so tall that our despair is shameful. Ears sharpen, the head leans forward, the body remains alert: not a sound to be heard. No cockerel crowing. How is one to attain this profound meditation carried out in silence? A silence with no memory of words. If you are death, how can one reach you?

This is a silence which never sleeps, is unable to sleep: immobile, awake and without any ghosts. It is dreadful – without even a ghost. There is no point in creating a door which might creak open or in hanging a curtain which might open and say something. This silence is empty and without promise. If only there were some wind. Wind is wrath, and wrath is life. Or some snow. Snow which is mute yet leaves traces and turns everything white. Children laugh, footsteps crunch and leave their mark. And there is the continuity of life. But this silence leaves no traces behind. One cannot speak of silence as one speaks of snow. No one can ask: 'Did you hear the night's silence?' For anyone who has heard silence cannot describe it.

Night descends with its little joys like someone lighting up the lamps with that weariness which justifies one's day. The children of Berne are asleep, the last doors are being locked. The paving stones glisten on the deserted streets. And the lights in the distance finally go out.

But this first silence is not yet complete. Be patient, the leaves on the trees still have to settle, tardy footsteps may yet be heard on the stairs.

But there comes a moment when an alert mind surfaces from a rested body, and the moon soars above the Earth. Then silence makes its appearance.

Recognition makes the heart beat faster.

One can record in a flash the day which has just passed. Or friends who have passed and been lost forever. But there is no shrinking from silence. Even the greatest sorrow, that of lost friendship, is simply evasion. For if, at first, silence appears to expect an answer – and how we long to be summoned in order to give that answer! – we soon discover that silence asks nothing of us, except perhaps our silence. How many hours are lost in the darkness imagining that silence is judging us – how we wait in vain to be judged by God. Justifications surface, tragic justifications of our own making, humble excuses to the point of indignity. It is so consoling, after all, for human beings to show their indignity and to be pardoned on the grounds that human beings are mortified from birth.

Until we discover that silence does not even want our indignity. What it wants is our silence.

One can even try to deceive silence by casually dropping the book at our bedside on to the floor. But, horror – the book falls into silence and loses itself in silence's mute, still abyss. But suppose some crazy bird were to sing? Such foolish hope. Its song would penetrate the silence like the feeble strains of a flute.

So, if we have enough courage, we give up struggling. We penetrate silence and accompany it, for we are the only ghosts of this night in Berne. Enter. Do not wait for the remaining darkness, but only for silence. It will be like sailing on a ship so enormous that we cannot tell it is a ship. A ship that will sail so slowly that we are not aware that it is sailing. No more can be asked of anyone. To live on the edge of death and the stars is as much excitement as we can bear. There is not even the offspring of star and woman to intercede compassionately on our behalf. Alone, our heart has to confront nothingness and alone beat loudly in the darkness of night. All we can hear is our own heart. When the heart appears naked, this is not communication but submission. For we were only made for a smaller silence.

If you lack courage, do not enter. Await the remaining darkness which precedes silence, your feet soaked by some mysterious foam spreading from within. Wait. The one insoluble by the other. The one beside the other, both invisible in the darkness. Wait. Not for the end of silence but for the blessed assistance of a third element, the light of dawn.

Never more to forget. No point even in trying to escape to

another city. For when it is least expected, one can suddenly recognize silence. Whilst crossing the road between cars sounding their horns. Between one ghostly outburst of laughter and another. After some word has been spoken. Sometimes in the very heart of that word. You cannot believe your ears, your eyes stare wildly – it is there. And this time, silence is the ghost.

PERSECUTED BUT HAPPY

So there! She had been one of the girls chosen from among her classmates! In her class at school there were girls and boys. Later, when she tried to recall them, it was like a snapshot, in which the group had been photographed and immediately frozen. And this snapshot, despite the fact that everyone looked stiff and formal, reminded her of certain fights which froze in her mind: a boy's leg entangled with a girl's arm to form some hybrid monster which hypnotised and distracted her during lessons about the Paraguayan War. A war from which she had probably never recovered for, whenever she thought about school, she could hear those sounding bugles from Paraguay.

For had she not been one of the girls chosen by the anonymous prankster? And where did he choose to write his graffiti? On the drawing-boards in the art room. For in that school where disorder reigned, there were special rooms for art work and chemistry. And in the art room, each pupil had a large, mobile drawing-board to work on.

Obviously, there had to be a first time.

Sitting down in front of her drawing-board, she spotted the graffiti at a glance, scribblings and drawings, the lettering minute, cramped but clear and all very tidy. Without really understanding, she was shocked at the thought that the graffiti might be insulting. Before actually examining the drawings and scribblings, she had turned quite pale. Had she turned pale with curiosity or surprise? The words baffled her, they seemed to be so technical and specialized, perhaps even foreign, and had clearly been compiled laboriously by someone with an analytical mind.

Before she could recover from the shock, the graffiti reappeared two days later. Then for a third time. And a fourth.

The oldest girl in the class took the initiative and showed the others her special drawing-board. This encouraged a second girl to reveal what had been written on her board. And then a third girl spoke up and showed what she had found. But all they knew was that some boy or gang of boys was responsible. Two of the girls singled out had dark hair. The third girl was blonde, to her great disappointment, for she was convinced this meant she was

dumb. Blondness, she thought, was unfortunately associated with some other world. Fairies and angels were always blonde. What did fate hold for her apart from vague uncertainties? She felt her soul must be dark, but who would ever suspect it beneath that image of dazzling gold? Meantime, some boy or gang of boys...

Here she was in her third year of secondary school, and to her shame she still could not understand the mechanics of life which – lo and behold – had suddenly been transferred to her drawing-board. As for guessing, she could guess certain things, but that was all, and it was not enough. If only she were angelic. But all she really lacked was that slow, progressive thing, a specialized knowledge of sex.

She lied to the others, pretending she understood everything. She did not understand, although she had suppressed her ignorance with solid but confused dreams which became her secret support.

The three girls were vehement in expressing their indignation: 'How dare they!' they kept repeating aloud without discussing it further. The blonde girl, perhaps because she was more fatuous than the others, had no practical suggestions to offer, while the other two, without having decided on any clear plan, were preparing to take action. The three girls were like three scouts or pioneers who had been intercepted on the Path of Virtue, and now they were three bemused detectives: which of the boys or youths could be the culprit? They scrutinized them one by one, but their insistent stares were not provocative because they felt they were in the right to...to do what? For they could no longer remember what that right might be.

But the faces of the boys in their class revealed nothing. Studied in this way, those faces had never looked more innocent as they chewed gum or smoked on the sly. There were two technical-drawing lessons each week. The girls could scarcely wait to get into the art room in order to see what new graffiti had replaced the previous scribblings and drawings. They were usually more of the same with few variants. It was like reading the editorial in a newspaper reporting the most awful and disturbing facts about the three girls. Could the things said about them really be true? Avidly examining those scribblings, they only allowed themselves to be shocked once they had digested every word. The real frustration was that they could not understand everything but they got the general meaning. And the general meaning suddenly delivered the world into their trembling hands.

But all good things come to an end. The two dark-haired girls, driven by wounded pride, or the desire for wider publicity, opted for a practical measure, to which the third girl passively agreed: the three of them lodged a formal complaint with the School Authorities. Outraged and demoralized, the Three Graces saw themselves as the proud representatives of that feminine world loved and dishonoured by so many. Of the three, only two spoke. The oldest of the three, whose boyfriend was soon to become her fiancé – she truly deserved those graffiti on her drawing-board, the blonde girl thought to herself, she truly deserved to be told of the horrors surrounding love, since she would soon be a bride.

So there. Serves her right. No one knows how the Authorities dealt with the problem. But suddenly there were no more graffiti on the drawing-boards.

Every effort was made to treat the matter as closed, but the girls made it their business to identify the culprit. Him? A boy whose parents had christened him with a Greek name. Almost certainly Spartan. For he believed that only the girl who could spartanly withstand the severity and crudeness of such love would be worthy of the experience. None of the three Athenians had withstood the test.

The drawing-boards have been wiped clean. No more graffiti? That is right, no more graffiti. That boy with the Greek name had such a handsome face, dear God. He was repeating the year, so much older than the others and knew such a lot. The fact that he was repeating the year lent him an air of superiority. Even the way he walked betrayed a certain insolence. One could tell how much he despised the rest of us: he gave the appearance of being a man among a crowd of silly little boys and girls. He did not chew gum. He was clean-shaven, with shrewd, deep-set eyes, his expression one of indifference, his hair cropped in military fashion. How could any girl resist adoring him with loathing? The blonde girl could not even bring herself to look at him. Why should she? When she had already memorized that face with revulsion. Once disciplined by the Authorities, the Spartan assumed the disdainful air of an exile: he had tried his best, but if we were ninnies who did not know any better, that was our misfortune. He was washing his hands of us. A great future awaited this general.

And from then on, there was nothing except squares and compasses on those drawing-boards, nothing but geometrical designs. No more graffiti executed with *finesse*. For when all was said and done, nobody had forced them to lodge a complaint.

THE EARTH'S FRAGRANCE

Have I already spoken about the perfume of jasmine? I have certainly spoken about the smell of the sea. Not to mention the earth's fragrance. I perfume myself to enhance my person. That explains why I cannot use perfumes I dislike. Choosing the right perfume is a matter of instinct. And like any art, one needs to know oneself. My favourite perfume is a secret. It belongs to me, it is me. Several friends have asked me for the name. I gave in and they bought my perfume. But they soon passed it on to me. My perfume simply did not suit them. I now refuse to give that name to anyone else. It is my secret. And there is something nice about perfuming oneself in secret.

FAMILIARITY

I am going through a rather dangerous phase. I find myself making contact so readily with other people that something awful is bound to happen to me. Nowadays, everyone wants to be my brother or my sister, my child, my father or my mother. Only last Sunday I found myself *in serious danger*. I was looking for a taxi, which is never easy on a Sunday, since people who rarely take taxis during the week suddenly decide to give themselves a treat. I could not find a taxi anywhere, not even in those streets where they are usually to be found almost immediately. So I decided to walk to the nearest taxi rank: there was not a taxi in sight. The place was deserted. I stood there, hoping a taxi would arrive. After waiting for ages, a group of teenagers appeared. Two of the girls were wearing mini-skirts and one of the boys had a long mane of hair. They parked themselves beside me and began fooling around for my benefit but looking sheepish. I thought to myself: they are also waiting for a taxi and are likely to grab the first one to appear. They will get there before me for I refuse to run. I find running so undignified. The thought bothered me so I finally asked straight out: 'Are you waiting for a taxi by any chance?' One of them replied impudently: 'You've guessed right, lady.' So I warned them: 'The first

taxi to turn up is mine for I was here first.' The long-haired youth started to protest: 'If you think...' but I interrupted him: 'I have nothing more to say to you. I am old enough to be your mother and I refuse to argue with a boy of your age.' For less than a second he just stood there staring at me in amazement before replying submissively in a quiet voice: 'All right, lady.'

The moment of danger had passed.

SLEEPING

Inspector Maigret uses a phrase which goes something like this: '*pour agacer le plaisir de dormir*', to provoke the pleasure of sleeping. Well, I have invented something just as nice. Once I have finally settled down for the night after a trying day, I think to myself: Suppose I had to go urgently to Bonsucesso at this hour to buy some medicine? The very thought is enough to make me quiver with pleasure as I lie in bed. Or I think to myself: Suppose the bell were to ring and some unwanted visitor got me out of bed and kept me up for hours listening to endless chatter? Confronted with such a thought, my bed becomes so precious, and I snuggle up cosily to provoke – or as Maigret would put it *agacer* – the sheer pleasure of possessing a bed.

MYSTERY

When I took up writing, what was I trying to achieve? I wanted to write something serene and unpretentious, such as the memory of some tall monument which seemed all the taller in retrospect. But in passing, I wanted to have really touched that monument. I honestly do not know what the word *monument* meant for me. And in the end I wrote something completely different.

WRITING

I once said that writing is a curse. I cannot remember precisely why I said it, or with such conviction. Today I repeat: writing is a curse, but a curse akin to salvation.

I am not referring to these articles I write for the newspaper but rather to those fragments which might eventually be transformed into a short story or novel. Writing is a curse because it gets a grip on you like some awful vice which becomes almost impossible to shake off because nothing can take its place. Writing is a form of salvation.

It saves the imprisoned soul, saves the person who feels useless, saves the day one lives yet cannot understand unless one is writing. To write is to try and understand, to try and repeat the unrepeatable, to savour to the last that sentiment which would otherwise remain vague and oppressive. To write is also to bless a life which has not been blessed.

What a pity I can only write when the 'thing' comes spontaneously. I sit here waiting at the mercy of time. And, between one genuine moment of inspiration and another, years may pass.

How I miss that heartache one suffers when writing books.

EXCESS AND PRIVATION

The worst thing of all is to become suddenly tired of everything. It is rather like excess, as if one already had everything and wanted for nothing more. Tired of the Beatles. Tired, too, of those who are not the Beatles. Even tired of my inner freedom, which I gained as such great cost. Tired of loving one's neighbour. Hatred would be preferable. What could save me from this feeling of excess (is it excess or a useless freedom?) would be anger. Not that loving anger you sometimes find. But naked, uncontrolled anger. The more violent the better. Anger with those who know nothing. Anger, too, with those intelligent people who always *have something to say*. Anger with *avant-garde* cinema, and why not? And anger with the other kind of cinema as well. Anger with the affinity I share with certain

people, as if this excess within me were not enough. And fury with success? Success is a joke, a false reality. Fury has saved my life. Without it, what would have become of me? How could I have borne to read those headlines reporting that one hundred starving children die every day in Brazil? Is anger my deep revulsion against being human? I am tired of being human. And angry at feeling so much love. Some days I am angry just to be alive. Because anger enlivens everything. I have never felt so alert. I know this will pass and that a vital sense of need will return. Then I shall want everything, everything! Oh, how good to need only to be satisfied. Oh, how good to feel that moment of need before the moment of satisfaction. But not to be satisfied too easily. Because one can tire of things which seem easy. Is even writing becoming too easy? Why do I now write with my fingertips when I used to write from the heart? It is sinful, I know, to seek privation. Yet the privation I am speaking of is much more satisfying than this feeling of excess. I simply do not want it. I am now going to sleep because I cannot bear today's world, so full of useless things. Goodnight, forevermore. I shall be back next Saturday. And please do not write to me: I have no desire to hear the human voice. And if I am listening to myself as I take my leave, that is only because it helps to increase my fury.

But there is only one fury which is blessed: the fury of those who suffer privation.

IDLE CHATTER

I awoke at four o'clock in the morning. Minutes later, the telephone rang. It was a composer of popular music who also writes his own lyrics. We chatted until six o'clock. He knew everything about me. A typical native of Bahia? And some of the things he had heard were not true. But I made no attempt to point this out. He was at a party and told me that his girlfriend – whom he was to marry some months later – was beside herself with jealousy when she knew he was telephoning me. There was also a certain Ana at the party and he told me she was a great admirer of my work. He wanted to invite me to the party because everybody was dying to meet me. I turned down the invitation.

On the other hand, I once went to a party at the home of Pedro and Míriam Bloch. Guimarães Rosa, who only had a few more months to live, was also there. Pedro Bloch and Guimarães Rosa

accompanied me into another room where we were subsequently joined by Ivo Pitangui. Guimarães Rosa happened to mention that, whenever he felt depressed, he would re-read things he had written. I shocked them by saying I could never bear to re-read anything I had written. Ivo said: 'To listen to you one would think you hated being a writer.' To some extent that is true and I cannot explain it. I even hate being called a writer. At this same party Sérgio Bernardes told me he had been hoping for years to have an opportunity to talk to me. But we did not talk. I asked for a Coca-Cola instead. For he was discussing things with the others which I could not understand and have long since forgotten. So I said: 'I adore listening to things which convince me of my ignorance.' And then took another sip of Coca-Cola. No, no, I am not being paid to advertise Coca-Cola.

Guimarães Rosa then told me something I shall never forget, it made me so happy. He told me he read my books 'not for the literature, but for the lessons in life'. He quoted whole sentences by heart which I had written and I did not recognize any of them.

Another person who telephoned me early one morning explained that he was passing my block when he saw my light on and decided to telephone. He made further telephone calls before confessing that he was lying and wanted to apologize. In fact, the window of his apartment faced mine and he had been spying on me night after night. Having told me he was a naval officer, I asked him if he watched me through binoculars. He fell silent. Then he confessed that he did in fact use binoculars. I was not pleased. Now that the truth was out, he began to feel embarrassed and promised not to telephone again. I thought it was a good idea. I then went into the kitchen to heat some coffee which I drank with all due solemnity. I felt as if an admiral were seated before me. Thankfully, I soon managed to forget that someone might be watching me through binoculars and carried on with my life as usual. As you can see, this is not a column but simply a little chat. How are you, dear readers? Suffering from privation or excess?

FERNANDO PESSOA TO THE RESCUE

I have noticed something which is worrying me. These articles I write for my weekly column are not exactly chronicles, in my opinion. I am beginning, however, to have a better understanding of the genre. Our best columnists cannot conceal their identity because they are obliged to sign their articles. We come to know them intimately and to recognize their style. And personally I think this is a good thing. When I write my books, I remain anonymous and in the background. Whereas in writing a weekly column I am allowing readers to know me. Am I in danger of losing my privacy? What am I to do? I type out my articles at the speed of the typewriter, and when I look to see what I have written, I realize I have revealed something about myself. I even believe that if I were to write an article about the over-production of coffee in Brazil, I should end up sounding personal. Am I in danger of becoming popular? The thought horrifies me. I must see if anything can be done to remedy the situation. Words by Fernando Pessoa which I read somewhere give me some reassurance: 'To speak is the simplest way of becoming unknown'.

THE PLEASURES OF A NORMAL LIFE

I usually sleep very badly, but last night I slept from eight o'clock in the evening until six o'clock this morning. Ten hours. I felt as pleased as Punch. I woke up feeling rested and relaxed. Ah, so this is what it means to lead a normal life? Well now, it is a very nice feeling.

Although never one for gorging myself, I started dieting some time ago to lose a few excess kilos. And suddenly my appetite became abnormal. I became desperate as if others were out to steal my share. So out of fury and greed, I suddenly began eating to my heart's content. And eating is so good, one even feels ashamed. And also a certain pride. Proud of being a demanding body. Ah, may those who have nothing to eat forgive me. Perhaps just as well they are not likely to be reading this article.

Another normal satisfaction is the feeling I experience when

I write with so-called *inspiration*. That sudden ecstasy as words flow in unison with thought and feeling. How good it feels to be alive at such moments!

Or when a friend telephones and there is that perfect rapport between voice and soul? When you replace the receiver you experience the pleasure of knowing that other people exist with whom you feel a certain affinity. I often find that affinity in others. Any friendship which springs up in this way is normal. The strange thing is how hard we have to struggle in order to achieve what we simply consider normal.

UNABLE TO FORGIVE

A woman interviewed by the BBC on *Woman's Hour* spoke about her experiences as a prisoner of war: 'When you have been through a great deal of suffering, you learn to understand the faults and virtues even of your enemies. Why should the enemy be completely bad or the victim completely good? They are both human beings, with all that is good and bad. And I believe if we appeal to what is good in people we shall nearly always win them over.'

I can see what the woman was trying to say, but I disagree. There comes a time when we must ignore our human understanding, defend the victim and denounce the enemy, whatever the rights and wrongs. And we must settle for a crude distinction between people who are good and those who are bad. Survival only comes when the victim is allowed to be cruel, to be cruel and rebellious. When merely understanding others is no longer justified.

BEING TAUGHT A LESSON

I was taught a lesson by one of my sons when he was still a child. Someone telephoned to inform me that a girl of my acquaintance was about to give a piano recital on television. I switched on the appropriate channel, feeling somewhat sceptical. All I could remember about the girl was that she was a sweet little thing who spoke and behaved like a small child. I wondered to myself: Has she enough strength to play well? When I met her it was an important day in her life. She was choosing a

negligée for her honeymoon. And I could scarcely believe that someone of her age could ask such ingenuous questions. Could such a girl play the piano professionally?

She began playing. And, dear God, she played with such power. Her face changed beyond recognition. When the music became violent, she compressed her lips. During the softer passages, they parted slightly as she began surrendering her whole being. And how she perspired. Beads of perspiration trickled down her face. The shock upon discovering these hidden depths brought tears to my eyes and I actually found myself weeping. My young son was watching me and I tried to explain: I find her playing so deeply moving. I must take a sedative. Whereupon he asked me:

– 'Can't you tell the difference between emotion and nervous tension? What you're suffering from is emotion.'

I could see his point. I agreed, and reassured him:

– 'I've changed my mind. I won't take a sedative after all.'

And I lived what had to be lived.

MEMORY OF A SMALL BOY

But how should I feel about my little boy? Because I cannot summon any definite feeling about him. What should I feel? I can see his face bronzed by the sun, a face entirely unaware of its expression. Busy licking at his ice-cream, he looks like some pretty animal – delicate yet ferocious.

The ice-cream is chocolate-flavoured. My son likes it. Sometimes he finds licking takes far too long so he bites into it, and the face he makes is that of someone who is totally unaware of the awkward happiness produced by a lump of frozen ice-cream filling a warm mouth. And such a pretty mouth. I look at my little boy, inscrutable as ever, but he is used to this foolish expression of intense love. He ignores me, and does not mind being observed as he performs this private ritual, so vital and delicate, as he carries on licking his ice-cream with his crimson, watchful tongue. I feel nothing other than a sense of being complete, weighed down by primary matter and solid wood. As a mother, I have no finesse. I am coarse and silent. With rude silence and vacant eyes, I watch the severe expression on my son's face. I can feel nothing because this must be crude, indivisible love. There I am, recoiling. Recoiling before so much. The enigmatic leaves me with a kind of cruel obstinacy: enigma is my name; there I am, enhanced by nature. The expression on my face must be one of obstinacy, the look in my eyes that of the foreigner who does not speak the language of the country. As if overcome by fatigue, I communicate with no one. My heart is heavy, stubborn, expressionless, and closed to any suggestions.

I am there, and I can see: my boy suddenly looks greedy – he must have found a lump of ice-cream with rather more chocolate and his practised tongue has prised it out. No one could describe me as thin: I am plump, heavy and big, with rough hands I inherited from my ancestors. I am a suspicious woman taking a pause. My son is now eating the chocolate coating. I am an immigrant who has thrown down roots on virgin territory. My searching gaze is absorbed and sombre. And what do I see? A small boy absorbed in eating ice-cream.

HUNGER

Dear God, help me in my misery for my need is great. I would exchange eternity after death for eternity here and now.

THE ENIGMAS OF SLEEP

I am sleeping. And however absurd it might seem, the pleasure of sleeping gently wakens me with a fright which is no less gentle. I am awake and I can still savour that rural area where the tentacles of a dream spread from my roots beneath the soil.

THE GREATER FORCE

Of course it is determinism. But you can be free by following your own determinism. Being imprisoned is to follow a destiny which is not our own. There is one great freedom in having a destiny. Our free will.

SIMPLY A PROCESS

To judge according to good and evil is the only way to live. Without forgetting, however, that this is simply a precept or process. In order not to lose oneself in the realms of truth, which possesses neither good nor evil.

THE SORROWS OF SURVIVAL: SÉRGIO PORTO

No, I no longer want to like anyone because it is painful. I can no longer bear to watch people dying who were dear to me. My world consists of persons who are mine – and I cannot lose them without losing myself.

Weeping without shame, I mourn the death of Sérgio Porto. He brought happiness to others, reached out to people and sweetened this infernal world. He made us smile and laugh. I could not help thinking: Oh God, why not me instead of him? People everywhere will miss him, there will be much less laughter. Yet here am I, writing for the few. So why not me instead

of him? Our people need bread and the circus.

Sérgio Porto, forgive me for never having told you how much I loved the things you wrote. Forgive me for not having got in touch to have a friendly chat. I mean a real chat: the kind where people open their hearts. For you also shed tears. Underneath the smiles and laughter. Forgive me for having outlived you.

I feel so weary.

I KNOW WHAT SPRING IS LIKE

I know it sounds rather fatuous to say in the middle of spring that *I* know what spring is like. But sometimes I am so reticent that friends get annoyed. My reticence stems from gratitude and is probably excessive. That childish *I* is uttered with a child's fear. But this time, when I saw that I was being much too reticent in expressing my happiness as spring arrived bringing showers, this time I embraced what belongs to me and to others.

I know what spring is like because I can smell the pollen in the atmosphere as if it were mine, I can feel myself tremble when a little bird sings, and feel that I am unconsciously renewing my life. Because I am alive.

Transparent and mortal, let that agonizing spring speak for me, that spring I impatiently await year after year. I know it brings turmoil to the senses, but why resist its dizzying spell? I accept this head of mine beneath the glistening showers of spring, I accept my existence and that of others because that is their privilege and without them I should die, I accept the possibility of the existence of the great Beyond despite my having prayed for so little, only to be denied.

I feel that to live is inevitable. In springtime I can sit smoking for hours, simply existing. But existing can sometimes cost blood, and there is no way of avoiding this because it is in my blood that I feel spring. And it hurts. Spring gives me things. It gives me the wherewithal to live. And I feel that I shall die on a spring day. Die of wounding love and a broken heart.

TERROR

The light was too strong for his eyes. Then he felt a violent tug; he was being settled in his cot but how was he to know? All he was aware of was the terror of those faces bending over him. He knew about nothing. And he could not move freely. The voices sounded like thunder, apart from one melodious voice: how comforting. But he was soon tucked in and started feeling terrified. He screamed between the cot-railings and saw

colours which he later recognized as blue. A disquieting blue which made him cry. And his fear of that dreadful colic. They would open his mouth and pour down his throat some nasty liquid which he would be forced to swallow. It was somehow easier to bear when the melodious voice gave him his medicine. On those occasions, he did not scream. The one positive thing was that he had just been born. He was five days old.

When he became a little older, he could hear without understanding: 'He's no longer any trouble but when he was born he cried and screamed such a lot. Thank goodness, he's getting easier to handle.' No, no, it was not easy. It never would be easy. Birth was the death of one being dividing into two solitary beings. It only seemed easy now that he had learned to cope with his secret terror which would last until death. The terror of being on earth yet longing for heaven.

COULD IT BE?

As it happens I feel very tired today so I shall say a few words about the joys of painful fatigue. Every deep joy touches the threshold of pain. That is no bad thing. Sleep, when it comes, is like a gentle swoon, a swoon brought on by love.

Dying must be like this: to be so tired for some reason that only the sleep of death will suffice. Sometimes dying seems selfish. But sometimes there is no other solution but death.

Could death be the ultimate joy on earth?

FIDELITY

Speaking for myself, I continue to read Monteiro Lobato. He brought the light of happiness into many an unhappy childhood. During difficult moments such as these, I feel like an abandoned child, and Monteiro Lobato brings me light.

STYLE

As a form of purification, I always hoped to be able to write one day without having to rely on my natural style. For even one's own style is an obstacle which must be overcome. I did not want to adopt my way of expressing things. I simply wanted to express them. Dear God, perhaps not even that.

And anything I might write would be human destiny with its mortal pain. The affliction of all that splendour, misery and death. Humiliation and decay forgiven, because they are part of man's total flesh and his wandering journey on earth. I should express the joys to be discovered in misery. This is my debt of happiness to a world I find far from easy.

DELICACY

When I write something, it often turns out to be tentative rather than accomplished. And that, too, gives me pleasure. For I have

no desire to capture everything. Sometimes I simply want to touch. So that the things I touch may later flower for others to seize with both hands.

LOVE FOR HIM

Through my grave errors – which I might be able to mention one day without being boastful – I learned to love. Even to the glorious extent of loving Nothingness. Awareness of my constant failure leads me to love Nothingness. And from this failure I renew my life. With broken bricks I erect horror, and with horror I love. Once born, this is all I can hope to do with myself: declare my love for you, my God, as I plunge into Nothingness.

A LOVING MOTHER

Some time ago my children started getting to know me. I mean as a person, for as a mother they knew me the moment they came into the world, just as I knew them before they were even born. Once they got to know me as a person, and not simply as a mother, it was curious to see how they began to think of me as someone to whom they could talk. If I happened to go into the bathroom to brush my hair in front of the mirror, they would follow me and carry on with the conversation. One of my boys became suspicious of what was happening and asked me outright: 'You're not just pretending to be interested in what we're saying, are you?' I reassured him, and pointed out that it was they who were interested in what *I* had to say. They would ask me questions and I replied as best I could. One of them asked me: 'Tell me the names of some important authors I should read.' Ah, so he was getting to that stage? I was delighted, and felt even more pleased to be able to give him the names of some excellent Brazilian authors. He began reading stories by Chekhov and enjoyed them. The collection was entitled *Tales of Old Russia*, which I can heartily recommend to my readers. There is a cheap paperback edition.

MAKE-BELIEVE

Pretend she was a princess swathed in blue by the descending twilight, pretend infancy was today and silvered with trinkets, pretend a vein had not been opened to allow crimson blood to trickle in white silence and that she was not deathly pale. Pretend this make-believe was really true, that it was necessary in the midst of this make-believe to speak a truth made of dense stone which might be contrasted with the green, scintillating make-believe of watchful eyes, pretend that she loved and was loved, pretend she did not need to die of longing, as she lay there in the transparent palm of God's hand. Pretend she was alive and not close to death, because to live, after all, was nothing more than drawing ever closer to death. Pretend that she did not sit there idly when the gold threads she was embroidering became entangled, making it impossible to undo the fine, cold threads. Pretend that she was clever enough to untie the sailor's knots binding her wrists, pretend she had a basket of pearls which shone like moonlight. Pretend she closed her eyes and that her loved ones suddenly appeared when she re-opened them, moistened by the most heart-felt gratitude. Pretend that everything she possessed was not pure make-believe. Pretend her heart did not swell and that a golden light guided her through a forest of artificial lakes and tranquil retreats. Pretend she was not lunar. Pretend she was not weeping.

'WANTED'

This is the ideal newspaper for classified advertisements and, as I scan the items under *Wanted* or *For Sale*, my eye catches the following advertisement printed in bold type:

'Man or woman wanted to help someone to remain contented. I am so contented that I cannot keep all this happiness to myself and must share it with others. Exceptional wages offered: the right person will be repaid minute by minute with happiness. Apply at once because my happiness is as fleeting as those falling stars one only sees after they have fallen; I need this man or

woman before dusk because once night falls no one can help me and it will be much too late. Applicants must not expect any free time until the horrors and dangers of Sunday have passed. Anyone who is sad may also apply because the happiness promised is so great that it must be shared before disaster strikes. I implore readers to apply, I implore them with all the humility of inexplicable happiness. There is also a house on offer, all lit up as if a ball were being held. The successful applicant will be allowed full use of the pantry, the kitchen and sitting-room.

P.S. No previous experience required. And my apologies for troubling you with this advertisement. But I swear to you that there is a divine happiness on this solemn face of mine to be shared with others.'

SÃO PAULO

I received a letter from Fernanda Montenegro in São Paulo. I telephoned her at once asking if I might publish it. Permission granted:

Clarice,

I am writing to you with deep emotion because anything you express always makes a deep impression. The feelings you arouse are so utterly feminine: painful, subdued and discreet, anguished yet concealed.

It gave me quite a shock to read my name in your handwriting, not because of any feelings of vanity but rather of solidarity. I am going through a period of black depression which is quite unlike me. Here in São Paulo actors have to perform on stage armed for their own safety. Policemen are posted outside all the theatres. Threatening telephone calls are being received daily by people connected with the theatre. This is the world we live in.

And what about our world, Clarice?

Not this one which has been forced by circumstances to become political, divided and aggressive. But that world evoked by Chekhov. Where shall we find rest, where shall we find peace? Alas, Clarice, our generation will find neither rest nor peace. When I was fifteen I passionately believed that my generation would untie the knot. Our generation has failed, expressing its sadness in a 'song without words', so common in the nineteenth

century. But love in the twenty-first century will be social justice. God willing.

We are learning the following lesson: to love is to possess. There is no solution in misery.

Those who possess nothing can give nothing. Those who go hungry have no dignity (Brecht). Clarice, forgive this outburst. But let me join you in the sad lament of those who perceive certain worlds, not just this one or that one, but also that other one, however vaguely outlined.

Our generation can find no rest. Is that not so, Clarice? But any struggle we put up will not be for ourselves. That is why we feel so sorry for ourselves. This is how I interpret those words you wrote in your article: 'I who have started telling lies. And here I am telling the truth. Because it was time to start lying. I deceive those who must be deceived and, because I know I am deceiving them, I speak harsh truths to myself.' The struggle to which I refer above, is the biblical struggle, the great struggle which embraces everything.

Returning to those 'harsh truths' of which you wrote: as an actress, deception is my truth. And that, Clarice, is my profession. But at heart, I am not deceived when I feel that our generation is beginning to commune with the cockroach. Our cockroach. (Fernanda is referring to the cockroach in my novel *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* [The Passion According to G.H.]) We know what that communion means, Clarice. I promise you I shall never shun the cockroach. I shall confront it. There is no avoiding it. Just give me one tranquil moment of light and inner calm, that is all I ask.

With deep affection.

Fernanda.

BRAVADO

Z.M. felt that life was slipping away between her fingers. In her humility, she was forgetting that she herself was the source of life and creation. So she rarely left the house and refused all invitations. She was not the type of woman to notice if a man was interested in her unless he declared himself – whereupon she would express surprise and accept the fact.

In the afternoon – it was Spring, the first day of Spring – she went to visit a woman friend who spoke to her bluntly. How could a grown woman like her be so humble? How could she fail to notice that several men were interested in her? Surely she realized that there was nothing like a love affair for satisfying one's vanity? She also told her that she had watched her enter a room where everyone knew each other. And, as it happened, there was no one present who could be considered her equal. Yet she entered the room looking nervous and distracted, like a timid doe with its head lowered. 'You must keep your head up and be prepared to suffer because you are different, so totally different from others. You must accept that you cannot live a bourgeois existence, so when you walk into a room you must hold your head high.' 'Even when I enter a room full of people on my own?' 'Precisely. You don't need anyone to accompany you. You should be self-reliant.'

She remembered that later that afternoon there was to be some sort of cocktail party for the primary school-teachers who were on holiday. She remembered the new attitude she wished to adopt and deliberately avoided making any arrangement to go with another teacher, male or female. She would face the ordeal alone. She put on a dress she had scarcely worn, but could not summon her courage. Then – as she realized later – she applied far too much mascara and put on so much lipstick that her face looked just like a mask. She had transformed herself into someone else. And that someone else was incredibly flamboyant, vain and self-assured. That someone else was everything she was not. But when the moment arrived to leave, she began to weaken. Could she be asking too much of herself? All dolled up and with this painted mask covering her face – ah, *persona*, how am I to

abandon you in order to be myself at last! Lacking courage, she sat in the arm-chair in that sitting-room she knew so well, her heart pleading with her to stay at home. As if her heart could foresee that she would be badly hurt, she who was no masochist. In the end she extinguished the cigarette-of-courage, got up and left.

It struck her that the torture endured by people who are timid has never been fully described. Travelling in that speeding taxi, she died a little.

And then she suddenly found herself confronted by an enormous room where there were probably lots of people but who were themselves somehow lost in that vast space where the cocktail party was in full swing like some modern ritual.

For how long would she be able to hold her head high? The mask was uncomfortable and she knew she looked much prettier without make-up. But without make-up her soul would be exposed. And she could not take that risk or permit herself such luxury.

Smiling, she greeted this one and that one. But, as with all cocktail parties, conversation was impossible and when she came to her senses, she was all alone once more.

She saw a man who had once been her lover. And she thought to herself: no matter how much love he may have received since, I was the one who gave him my whole body and soul. The two of them looked at each other, scrutinized each other, he no doubt startled by that painted mask. She could think of nothing to say except to ask him if he was still her friend. He replied yes, for always.

Until she felt she could no longer stand there holding her head high. But how was she to cross that enormous room and reach the door? All on her own, like some fugitive? She mumbled her plight to one of the women teachers, who escorted her across that vast expanse to the door.

And in the shadows of that spring evening she was an unhappy woman. Yes, she was different. Of course, she was shy. She was certainly hypersensitive. And yes, she had seen a former lover. The shadows and perfume of spring. The world's heart was beating in her breast. She had always known how to inhale the smell of nature. Having finally found a taxi, she got in almost crying with relief, remembering how the same thing had happened to her in Paris, only worse. She travelled home as if fleeing from the world. But it was useless hiding: the truth is that she did

not know how to live. At home she felt safe. She looked at herself in the mirror as she washed her hands and saw that *persona* attached to her face. That *persona* had the fixed smile of a clown. After washing her face, she discovered to her relief that her soul was once more laid bare. After taking a sleeping pill, she lay wide awake, waiting for sleep to come and promising herself that she would face no more risks without taking some precautions. The sleeping pill had a calming effect. And the endless night of dreams began.

A KNOWING SENSIBILITY

Sometimes people wishing to pay me a compliment tell me I am intelligent. And they are surprised when I tell them that being intelligent is not my strong point and that I am no more intelligent than other people. They then accuse me of being modest.

Of course I know about certain things. I was a bright student and intelligence has helped me to cope with certain situations. And like many others, I am capable of reading and understanding books which are generally considered to be difficult.

But often this so-called intelligence of mine is so limited that one would think I was stupid. People who refer to my intelligence are, in fact, confusing *intelligence* with what I would call a *knowing sensibility*. Now that is something I really do possess.

And notwithstanding my admiration for sheer intelligence, I find a knowing sensibility much more important when it comes to living with others and trying to understand them. Nearly everyone I know could be described as intelligent. They also happen to be sensitive. They can feel things and be deeply moved. I daresay this is the kind of sensibility I exercise when I write, or in my relationships with friends. I also exercise it when I come into superficial contact with certain people whose aura I can sense immediately.

I daresay this kind of sensibility, which is capable of stirring emotions and making one think even without using the mind, is a gift. And a gift which can be diminished with neglect or perfected if exercised to the full. I have a friend, for example, who is not simply intelligent but also extremely sensitive, an essential quality in her particular profession. As a result, she possesses what I would call a *knowing heart*, so knowing that it can guide her and others as reliably as radar itself.

AN INTELLECTUAL? CERTAINLY NOT!

I also find it difficult to dissuade certain people from calling me an intellectual. Once again, I am not being modest but simply

stating a fact which does not bother me in the least. To be an intellectual, one has to exercise, above all, one's intelligence. What I exercise is not so much intelligence as intuition and instinct. To be an intellectual means being someone who is learned. I am such a poor reader that I must shamelessly confess that I really have no great learning. I have still to read the great works of civilization. Besides, I read so little these days. The only time I ever read a great deal was between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, when I literally devoured every book I could lay my hands on. After that, I only read sporadically without being guided by anyone. Not to mention – and here I must confess my shame – those years when I read nothing except detective stories. Nowadays, I am often lazy when it comes to writing, but I am even lazier when it comes to reading.

I cannot even claim to be a writer, for I have never made a 'profession' or 'career' out of writing books. I only write when things come to me spontaneously and I genuinely feel like writing. Does that make me an amateur?

So how would I describe myself? I am someone with a heart which often intuits things, I am a person who has tried to express in words a world which is both unintelligible and impalpable. Above all, a person whose heart beats ever so gently with joy whenever it succeeds in expressing something about human or animal life.

WHAT I SHOULD LIKE TO HAVE BEEN

Naming what I am is of little importance. What is important is what I should like to be.

What I should like to be is a fighter. That is to say, someone who fights for the good of others. That is what I have always wanted to be ever since childhood. Why should I have been destined to write what I have written, instead of developing the fighting streak in my nature? When I was a little girl, my family jokingly called me the 'protector of animals'. And people only had to accuse someone and I would immediately rush to his or her defence. The social drama left me distressed and bewildered as I witnessed the injustices to which the so-called underprivileged classes are subjected. In Recife, where I spent my childhood, I used to visit our maid's house in the slums every Sunday. And the misery I saw there convinced me that some-

thing had to be done to change the situation. I wanted to act. As a child, I often saw crowds gather on the street to listen to someone making a passionate speech about our tragic social situation. And I can remember how I would shake with anger and promise myself that I would pursue this cause one day and defend the rights of others.

And what did become of me before long? In the end, I became this person who seeks out the things she feels deep down and wishes to express in words.

Someone so unimportant, so very unimportant.

EXTRACT

This is about a character I once began to create but finally abandoned before putting him into any of my novels: 'His inner nature was neither apparent nor perceptible. His true being was like some distant shore in faraway Asia. He was here and the shore way over there. And although unable to deny his own existence, he made no attempt to prove himself, either to himself or to others. What he really was could not be proven. The only way to discover his true nature in any depth would be to believe. To believe in this thing through an act of faith, because only by believing could there be any certainty.'

THE DREAM

I do not understand dreams but there was one dream which seemed to have some meaning even though I could not understand it.

I dreamt that, having closed the door when I went out, I found on my return that it had merged with the walls and that even the outlines had disappeared. Faced with the choice of searching for traces or making another opening, I felt it would be easier to start digging. So I set to work, determined to find a way through. But no sooner had I made a hole than I realized that no one had entered here before. This was the first door that had ever been there. And although this narrow entrance was in the same house, it was as if I were seeing the house for the first time. And my bedroom was like the inside of a cube. I could now see that I had been living inside a cube.

At this point I woke up in a cold sweat. I had been having a nightmare despite the apparent calm surrounding the events in my dream. I cannot explain what those images might have symbolized. But the idea of going through one's 'first door' fascinates and terrifies me to the extent of becoming a nightmare in itself.

A STORY IS LAUNCHED

'...and this story cannot be told quickly because the words are slow in coming. It is about a woman. She lived in a rented room in a house occupied by a family. It was a busy household and the family were so absorbed in their many activities that they scarcely noticed the woman in the rented room. Sometimes the father or one of the sons would pass her on their way to the bathroom and exchange a few words. After some time, not even that: nothing except a mumbled greeting and then silence. The lodger was middle-aged. She took great care of her few belongings and kept herself scrupulously clean. This was reflected in her room: it was clean and almost bare. This woman defied description unless you took the trouble to penetrate her innermost thoughts, something no one had ever bothered to do, she aroused so little interest. For this woman had silently experienced an adventure. And, strange to relate, that adventure was spiritual...'

I simply cannot remember which story I was trying to tell when I began writing those lines. I know they were meant to be a story, but what could that spiritual adventure be? I can no longer remember, and I invite my readers to finish the story for themselves as a little exercise...I simply hoisted the sails and headed out to sea. And the route? Who knows? I have lost my compass.

REBELLION

When love is too great it becomes futile: it can no longer be put to use and not even the person loved has the capacity for so much love. I became as bemused as any child when I realized that even in love we must be sensible and show restraint. Our emotional life, alas, is extremely bourgeois.

EXPLOITING TIME

I cannot write when I am anxious or awaiting the solution to some problem, for in those situations I do everything possible to make the hours pass. Writing, on the other hand, deepens and extends time. Although recently, dire necessity has taught me to keep myself busy by writing, just to see if the hours will pass.

EAT UP, EAT UP

I do not know what happens in other people's homes. In mine, everybody talks about food. 'Is that cheese yours?' 'No, help yourself.' 'Is the cereal good?' 'Excellent!' 'Mummy, ask the cook to make a prawn cocktail. I can show her.' 'When did you learn to make a prawn cocktail?' 'I've eaten them lots of times and I know how they're made.' 'Today all I want to eat is a plate of pea soup and some sardines.' 'This meat is much too salty.' 'I don't feel hungry, but if you buy some peppers, I'll eat those.' 'No, Mummy, eating out in restaurants costs a lot of money. I'd rather eat at home.' 'What's for dinner this evening?'

No, my house is not metaphysical. No one is overfed in this house but everybody likes to eat well. As for me, I spend all my time opening and closing my purse to hand out money for yet more shopping. 'I'm eating out, Mummy, but keep me some dinner.' I am a firm believer in keeping the fire lit in preparation for any eventuality. That is what a home is all about. The sacred flame of love should always be lit and the pots kept standing on the stove. Frankly, we enjoy eating. And I can say with some pride that I keep a good kitchen. As well as eating, we discuss what is happening in Brazil and in the world at large, we argue about the clothes we consider suitable for certain occasions. We are a real family.

PAINFUL EMOTION

I can think of no other name for this pain which comes whenever I visit a museum or art gallery. No sooner do I start going

round looking at the pictures than I can feel this pain in my left shoulder. The pain is always the same. I wish I knew what brings it on. Perhaps emotion?

MÁRIO QUINTANA AND HIS ADMIRER

I have received a letter from the priest-poet Armindo Trevisan. He has told me something which Mário Quintana told him. An eight-year-old girl, 'intelligent and pretty', made up her mind that she must meet the poet Mário Quintana. She insisted at such length that her teacher decided to contact the poet and request an interview. He agreed.

On the appointed day, the little girl, accompanied by her teacher, turned up at the *Correio do Povo* [The People's Post] where Quintana works. The little girl was introduced to the poet, they chatted, and she listened to what he had to say.

Later that day, the teacher telephoned Quintana and asked the poet if he would like to know what his young admirer thought of him. Quintana replied that a child's opinion, however favourable or unfavourable, must always be respected. So the teacher told him how the little girl had reacted:

– 'My beloved poet is very nice but seems a bit simple.'

The blessed simplicity of one of my favourite poets.

Father Armindo, allow me to quote an extract from your letter which further illustrates your Christian humility. I hope you will not mind. I admire you so deeply that I cannot resist quoting this short extract. You write: 'Allow me to pray for you, and do not fail to pray for me because I am a wretched sinner who needs your prayers, whatever they may be. My heart tells me that you are closer to God than I am even when you are *teasing* Him and giving the impression of *protesting* about many things over which I have no control...'

Father Armando, it is four o'clock in the morning and such a lovely hour to be awake because the whole world seems to be praying. My prayer for you is that the world will always be beautiful in your eyes, that you may enjoy the food you eat, and continue to write poetry, because writing poetry is in itself a form of salvation.

And you must pray for me. I feel at a loss as I try to understand what is happening to me and, most of all, what is not happening to me.

THE RITUAL

Dressing up is such a solemn ritual. Cloth is not simply woven material, but material covering something. And I give the cloth form with my body. How can simple cloth take on so much life? My hair, which I washed this morning and dried out in the sun as I sat on the terrace, is as fine as old silk. Am I pretty? Not at all, but I am a woman. A secret ignored by all, even by the mirror: I am a woman. Earrings? I hesitate. Perhaps not. I want my ears to be delicate and unadorned – discreetly naked. I hesitate further: there might be even greater richness in concealing my ears under my hair. But I cannot resist it: I expose them, pushing my hair back. And the disquieting image is that of a hieratic Egyptian queen, with elongated neck and incongruous ears. An Egyptian queen? No, this is me, looking as ornate as those women in the Bible.

THE EARTHQUAKE

She was having a busy time: she had done her shopping, made several telephone calls, including a particularly troublesome one to call the plumber. She then went into the kitchen to see if the children's lunch was nearly ready because they must not be late for school; she laughed at a joke made by one of the maids, then answered a telephone call inviting her to a charity tea; she prepared a snack for the children to take to school and finally closed the door after them.

Then – then from her very womb came a distant tremor as if forecasting an earthquake, from her womb came the great rumbling of a tower in peril, from her womb came a tremor, distorting her face and body – forcing its way through with enormous difficulty – before finally exploding in an outburst of weeping, almost silent, the dry torture of silent weeping interrupted by the occasional sob concealed even from herself, weeping she had never suspected, wanted or foreseen – rocked back and forth like a tree which is always more shaken than a fragile plant – ducts, veins and tendons finally ruptured by the thick salt-water

of tears. Only after it passed did she perceive that no, there were no tear-stains. It was the dry earthquake of weeping.

PERFECTION

I am reassured to find that everything that exists, exists with absolute perfection. Anything the size of a pinhead does not exceed even by a fraction of a millimetre the size of a pinhead. Everything that exists reveals the utmost precision. Unfortunately, most things that exist with this precision are technically invisible to the naked eye. And although truth is precise and clear in itself, by the time it reaches us it has become blurred because technically invisible. It is just as well that truth should reach us as if it were the secret meaning of things. Confused, we end up divining perfection.

THE BIRTH OF PLEASURE (EXTRACT)

Pleasure brings so much pain that one almost prefers familiar sorrow to unaccustomed pleasure. True happiness cannot be explained or understood. It is best compared to the beginnings of some irretrievable disaster. This complete fusion is unbearably consoling – as if death were our greatest and final good, only it is not death, it is immeasurable life which comes to resemble the splendour of death. One must absorb happiness little by little – for it is emergent life. And let those lacking in strength cover each nerve with a protective membrane, with the membrane of death, in order to withstand life. That membrane might consist of some formal act of protection, of silence or some words without meaning. For pleasure is not to be toyed with. We are that pleasure.

ANGINA OF THE SOUL

This kind of angina does not kill. Yet anything would be preferable to this anguish. When it comes, the chest contracts and there is an unmistakable smell of mould in what was once called the soul but is now without a name. And the lack of hope in hope. And having to conform without resigning oneself. Not confessing to oneself because there is no longer anything to confess. Or because words cannot be found. Not being truly oneself because one does not know what that might imply; one only knows that it is not happening. And then there is the trauma of being alive. I am speaking of anguish itself, of evil. For anguish comes into it: because they are alive, all living things contract.

IF IT WERE ME

Whenever I mislay an important document and cannot find it, I ask myself: If it were me and I wanted to keep a document in a safe place, where would I put it? Sometimes this works. But at other times, I am so harassed by the phrase 'If it were me', that the search for that document becomes secondary and I begin to think. Or rather, to feel.

And I feel anything but reassured. Try it: if it were you, what would you do? From the outset one feels a certain inhibition: the lie into which we have settled has just been ever so slightly disturbed. Yet I have read biographies of certain people who suddenly started to be their true selves and completely transformed their lives. I think if I were to become truly me, my friends would stop greeting me on the street, for even my appearance would have changed. In what way? I cannot say.

I cannot reveal half the things I would do if it were left to me. I believe I might even end up in jail for certain crimes. And if it were left to me, I should give away everything that is mine and entrust the future to the future.

'If it were me' seems to sum up the greatest risk we face in life, a new entrée into the unknown. Yet I cannot help feeling that, after those first mad moments of euphoria, we would finally

experience the world. We would certainly experience all the sorrow of this world. And our own sorrow too, that sorrow we have learned to ignore. But sometimes we would also be overcome by sheer ecstasy, by that utter happiness we can barely sense. Wait, I believe I am already experiencing it as I begin to smile and feel that sense of inhibition which comes when one is confronted by something momentous.

HOW DOES ONE WRITE?

When I am not writing, I simply do not know how one writes. And if this most sincere of questions did not sound childish and sham, I would seek out some friends who are writers and ask them: how does one write?

How does one write, in effect? What does one say? How does one say it? How does one begin? And what is one to do with that blank page which confronts the writer?

I know there is only one answer, however perplexing, and that is, by writing. No one is more surprised than me when I write. Nor have I ever got used to the idea of being called a writer. Because unless I am actually writing, I really do not know how to write. Could it be that writing is not a profession? That there is no apprenticeship involved? What is writing then? I shall only consider myself a writer when I can say with any confidence: I know how one writes.

A DIALOGUE

When I studied French I would have found it much more enjoyable if my text-book had been like the one I came across recently. It contains a dialogue between a Dog and his little Puppy. The Dog asks: 'Have you been studying hard?' The Puppy: 'Yes, father.' The Dog: 'Mathematics?' The Puppy: 'No.' The Dog: 'Science?' The Puppy: 'No.' The Dog: 'Geography, philosophy or history?' The Puppy: 'No.' The Dog: 'What have you been studying then?' The Puppy: 'Foreign languages.' The Dog: 'And which foreign language have you mastered?' The Puppy: 'Miaow.'

A dear friend of mine took the trouble to write down the things I said to her during a telephone conversation. She later gave me her notes and I was taken aback despite recognizing myself as I read the following: 'Sometimes I sense that I am blindly searching for something; I want to go on, feel obliged to go on. I feel I could even summon the courage to go on. But my fear is that it might all be too unpredictable, that I might find what I do not want. I would have enough courage but at such cost, at such great cost, and I am weary. I have always paid dearly, and all of a sudden I can take no more. I feel that I must go in one direction or the other. Or give up: live with greater humility. But what am I to give up? Where would I find such a task, such sweetness, such a thing? I have become addicted to living with this extreme intensity. The hour of writing is the reminiscence of a situation which is entirely mine. And that is when I feel most abandoned.'

ANNUNCIATION

At home I have a painting by the Italian artist Savelli. I valued it all the more when I learned that he had been commissioned to design the stained-glass windows in the Vatican.

However much I study the painting, I never grow tired of it. On the contrary, I always find something new to admire.

In the painting, the Virgin Mary is seated beside a window and it is clear from her swollen belly that she is pregnant. The archangel at her side is watching her. And the Virgin, as if overwhelmed by the archangel's message, prophesying her destiny and that of future generations, raises her hand to her throat with surprise and anguish.

The angel, who has entered by the window is almost human: but those long wings remind us that angels can move from one place to another without touching the ground. Those wings are quite human: they appear to be made of flesh and the angel's face is that of a man.

This is the most exquisite and harrowing truth the world has to offer.

All human beings experience annunciation. With pregnant souls we raise our hands to our throats with surprise and anguish. As if each of us had learned at a given moment in life that we have a mission to fulfil.

That mission is by no means easy: each of us is responsible for the entire world.

THE VIRGIN IN ALL WOMEN

Every woman on being told she is pregnant raises her hand to her throat: she knows she will give birth to a human being who will be forced to follow in Christ's footsteps, frequently stumbling along the way under the weight of the cross. There is no escape.

HE WOULD BE JOYFUL

Christ would be happy if He could avoid showing the world its own sorrow: as a man He was perfect, which explains why His joys were also perfect.

THE HUMILITY OF ST JOSEPH

St Joseph is the symbol of humility. He knew he had not fathered the Holy Child yet he cared for the pregnant Virgin as if she were the mother of his offspring.

St Joseph is human kindness itself, the true example of self-effacement at a great moment in history. It is he who watches over humanity.

MY CHRISTMAS

When the children were small and had to be in bed long before midnight, we decided to forgo the traditional Christmas Eve Supper and have a celebration lunch on Christmas Day itself. The children eventually grew up but we continued to exchange gifts on Christmas Morning and celebrate over lunch.

With no supper to prepare on Christmas Eve, I had the evening to myself. But for the last three or four years I have fulfilled a solemn commitment on that evening.

This came about when I asked a girl, whom I did not know all that well, how I should spend my Christmas Eve. She immediately replied: 'Do what I do on Christmas Eve. I take enough pills to make me sleep for forty-eight hours.' I was astonished and intrigued, and asked her to explain. 'Christmas always brings back sad memories. My father and mother both died at Christmas. After they were gone, I could never bring myself to celebrate Christmas again.' I pointed out the danger of taking so many pills and warned her that, instead of sleeping for forty-eight hours, she might find herself sleeping forever.

Then I had an idea: perhaps in future we could spend Christmas Eve together and dine out in some restaurant. We could meet around eight o'clock in the evening and then she would see for herself how the city's restaurants were full of people with neither a home nor anything resembling a home where they

might spend Christmas Eve. After dinner she drops me off at my apartment and then goes to fetch an aunt who always accompanies her to Midnight Mass. We agreed that we would share the bill for dinner and exchange presents: presents to remind us that we have each other.

But one Christmas my friend had to cancel our arrangement and, though knowing that I was not religious, she gave me a Holy Missal. I opened it to find that she had written inside: Pray for me.

The following September, a fire broke out in my apartment which left me so badly burned that I hovered between life and death for several days. My bedroom was completely destroyed. Plaster fell from the ceiling and walls, my furniture and books were reduced to ashes.

I shall make no attempt to explain what caused the fire. But strange to relate, my Missal remained intact, apart from some slight damage to the cover.

LEARNING TO LIVE

Thoreau was an American philosopher whose profound thoughts cannot be summarized in a newspaper article, but he wrote many things which might help us to lead a more rational, useful and agreeable life with rather less anguish.

Thoreau found it distressing, for example, to watch his fellow-men devote all their energies to making money for some distant future. That people should give some thought to their future was no bad thing. But 'Do try to improve the present', he would exclaim. Before adding: 'We are living *now*.' Thoreau sadly observed: 'Men spend all their time hoarding treasures which will be eaten by worms, eroded by rust, or fall into the hands of thieves.'

The message is clear: do not sacrifice today for tomorrow. If you are unhappy at present, do something about it *now*, because we only exist from one *now* to the next.

Besides, if we examine our consciences, we can all remember moments that were lost nevermore to return. There are moments in all our lives which we regret having ignored, allowed to pass or refused, and that regret is as painful as the deepest sorrow.

Thoreau was anxious that we should lose no time in doing what we wish to do. All his life he preached and practised the need to waste no time in doing the things we believe to be important.

For example, he would urge all those young men and women who dreamed of being writers to start writing at once instead of making excuses that they were either too busy or lacking in talent and inspiration.

Nor did he have any patience with those people who waste so much time studying life that they never get down to living. He wrote: 'It is only when we discard all knowledge that we begin to know.'

And he offered these bold words of encouragement: 'Why not abandon ourselves to the torrent, why not open the flood-gates and put our whole mechanism into action?' Those words are enough to send the blood coursing through my veins. And *now*, dear friends, means *this very minute*.

Thoreau believed that fear prevented us from exploiting the present. And our lack of self-confidence. He once wrote: 'Public opinion is a feeble tyrant when compared with the low opinion we have of ourselves.' It is true: even those people who give the impression of being self-assured have such a low opinion of themselves that they are simply concealing their fear. And this worried Thoreau, who believed that 'how a man sees himself determines, or rather reveals, his destiny.'

And, surprising as it may seem, he would urge his readers to 'take pity on yourselves' whenever they were leading a life of quiet despair. He would counsel them not to be too hard on themselves at such moments. Fear, Thoreau argued, provokes unnecessary cowardice. In that situation, people should not judge themselves too harshly. 'I believe,' he wrote, 'that we should have much greater confidence in ourselves. Nature conforms as much to our weakness as to our strength.' Appalled at our common tendency needlessly to complicate matters, he repeated incessantly: 'Aim for greater simplicity! Aim for greater simplicity!'

Not so long ago, I opened a newspaper and in an article by someone whose name I have alas forgotten, I found several quotations attributed to Bernanos which truly complement those of Thoreau, whom the French writer probably never read.

The author of the article comments at one point that Bernanos was ever prepared to castigate the falseness of the so-called 'free world'. For he was seeking a '*Salvation achieved by taking risks without which life is worthless*, and not by senile withdrawal which is not only practised by the elderly but by all those who defend their positions whether ideological or religious.'

Bernanos, the article went on, considered greed in all its forms to be the greatest sin of all. 'Greed and apathy are destroying the world.' And 'both of these vices stem from egoism', the author of the article concludes.

Overcome with the joy of living, I repeat: *Salvation is achieved by taking risks without which life is worthless!*

Happy New Year.

1969

THE HUMAN CONDITION

My condition is extremely humble. I feel inhibited. So much so that it would be pointless having more freedom: my humble condition would not allow me to exercise my freedom. While the condition of the universe is so great that the word *condition* is scarcely apt. I am so out of step with the world that it is almost comical. However hard I may try, I cannot get into step. I have tried time and time again only to make a fool of myself: one of my legs is too short. The irony is that my crippled condition is also a happy one. Being happy is part of that condition. But if I become serious and try to get into step with the world, then I tear myself to pieces and give way to panic. Accompanied by an outburst of bitter laughter which does no harm because it is part of the same condition. One's condition cannot be cured, but fear of that condition is curable.

MIRACULOUS LEAVES

No, miracles never happen to me. I sometimes hear people discuss them and that gives me hope. But it also makes me rebel: why do they never happen to me? Why do I only hear about them? For I have heard conversations about miracles such as the following: 'He told me that if such and such a word were to be spoken, some valuable object would smash into pieces.' The objects in my house are broken in much more humdrum fashion, usually by one of the maids. I have even come to the conclusion that I am one of those people who roll stones throughout the centuries. I mean rough stones, not the smoothly polished kind. Although I do have fleeting visions before falling asleep – could those be miraculous? But it has already been patiently explained to me that this phenomenon even has a name: *cidetismo*, which means being able to project unconscious images into the sphere of hallucination.

Not exactly a miracle. But what about certain coincidences? I experience them all the time, lines which keep coinciding and crossing one another, and as they cross they form a faint, fleeting

point, so faint and fleeting, so subtle and elusive that simply to speak of it is like speaking of nothing.

But yes, I have experienced a miracle. Miraculous leaves. Walking along the street the wind deposits a leaf on my hair. The incidence of millions of leaves transformed into a single leaf, the incidence of millions of people reduced to one person – me. This has happened so frequently that I have modestly come to consider myself as someone *chosen* by the leaves. Furtively, I remove the leaf from my hair and slip it into my handbag, as if it were the tiniest of diamonds. Until one day, on opening my handbag, I find a withered leaf among the objects, shrivelled up and dead. I throw it away. I have no wish to keep a dead talisman as a souvenir. Besides, I know that new leaves will coincide with me.

One day a leaf grazed my eyelashes, and I thought to myself: *God* is being extremely delicate.

LÚCIO CARDOSO

Lúcio, how I miss you, wild steed that you were, riding beyond all frontiers.

I constantly suffer from melancholy. But on two occasions that melancholy has been almost unbearable.

The first was when you suddenly became ill in the prime of life, you who embodied life.

Lúcio Cardoso did not die of illness. He went on living, but had stopped writing, this man who had hitherto written out of glorious and eternal compulsion. Once he became ill, he spoke no more. Yet this was the man who had told me some of the most inspired things any human being could wish to hear, He became paralysed all down the right side of his body. Afterwards he learned to paint with his left hand: his creative powers had not been extinguished.

With his speech impaired, he would mumble or remain silent: only his eyes sparkled, those eyes which had always shone so brightly, captivating and with a mischievous gleam.

After he became ill, he continued to smile. Here was a man who could smile at the disease that was killing him. Lúcio took risks and paid high stakes. Using his left hand, he began to transpose on to canvas the things he could no longer write: transparencies and luminous tints and subtle touches which he appeared to be discovering for the first time and which lit up his soul. I have a picture he painted before his illness which is almost totally black. Light came into his painting after the shadows of illness.

I suffered my second bout of deep melancholy as he lay close to death.

Some women friends had gathered outside his hospital room. Most of them could no longer bear to watch him lying there, motionless and in a state of coma.

I went into his room and saw the dead Christ. His face had the greenish hue of those portraits by El Greco. Beauty was written all over his features.

Previously, even when he remained silent, at least he could hear me. Now he would not be able to hear me even if I were to

declare aloud that in my youth he had been the most important influence in my life. Lúcio taught me how to discover the real people behind the masks, he also taught me the best way to contemplate the moon. It was Lúcio who transformed me into a fellow-native of Minas Gerais: I passed the test and mastered all those traits I so admire in people from that part of Brazil.

I did not keep vigil beside the corpse or attend the requiem mass and funeral. There was much too much silence inside me. I spent the next few days alone, saw no one: I had seen death.

I keep remembering things. I keep getting them mixed up. One minute I can hear him telling me to have no fear of the future because he saw me as a person with the flame of life. And he taught me what it means to have the flame of life. The next minute I can see both of us walking merrily along the street munching pop-corn. Or recall how we used to meet at the clinic where I was getting some movement back into my injured hand and where Pedro and Míriam Bloch were looking after Lúcio. At the clinic, we fell into each other's arms.

Lúcio and I always accepted each other: him with his mysterious, secret life, me with what he called 'my impassioned nature'. We were both so capricious that, had it not been utterly impossible, who knows, perhaps we might have married.

Helena Cardoso, a writer of such refinement that she could take a butterfly by the wing without damaging it, the eternal sister of Lúcio, can I not persuade you to write a book about your brother? You could write about his dreams and joys, about his moments of anguish, about his struggle with God, about his deep humanity, about his pursuit of all things human, his flights along the paths of Good and Evil. You, Helena, suffered with Lúcio and are, therefore, the person who loved him most of all.

As I write, I raise my eyes from time to time and gaze at the antique musical box Lúcio gave me. It plays *Für Elise* and the sound is like that of a harpsichord. I have listened to that music so many times that the spring has snapped. But has the musical box been silenced? No. Just as Lúcio lives on inside me.

ALMOST

My taxi was approaching the tunnel which goes to Leme and Copacabana when I saw the Church of St Teresa of Lisieux. My heart beat faster: I recognized in the depths of my suffering soul that I might be able to find refuge in that church.

I asked the taxi-driver to stop, paid him and got out. With humility I penetrated the cool shadows inside the church. I sat down on a pew and there I remained. The church was completely deserted. The overpowering perfume of flowers filled the air and almost suffocated me. Little by little my inner turmoil began to subside into sad resignation: I was offering my soul in exchange for nothing. For it was not peace I felt. I was conscious that my world had crumbled only to leave me standing there, a bewildered, anonymous witness.

I gradually forgot my sorrow and started looking at the statues of saints. They had all been martyred, for that is the path both human and divine. They had all renounced a greater life in favour of a deeper, more bruised existence. None of them had *taken advantage* of the only life we possess. All of them had been foolish in the purest sense of the word. All had become immortal in order to answer our pleas for mercy. And why, dear God, was it so necessary to sacrifice our most legitimate desires? Why this mortification in life?

I looked round the empty church in search of an answer and saw a great coffin in the centre of the main nave. I got to my feet and drew near. Lying there was the effigy of St Teresa of Lisieux, her feet covered with flowers...I stood there staring.

Yet something puzzled me. Any statue I had ever seen of St Teresa depicted her as a young nun carrying flowers in her arms. But this St Teresa was so old that her skin looked like crinkled parchment. Her eyes were closed, her white hands crossed on her breast, the bright, red flowers burgeoning at her feet like a cry of life.

I realized at once that the effigy was not made of porcelain. What could it be then? It looked like wax. But wax would melt in summer or from the heat of the candles, so it could not be

wax. I had never seen this material before. I knew that if I touched the effigy I would recognize the texture at once. When I was a little girl, Rosa our maid would get annoyed at my habit of touching everything and she used to say: 'This girl's eyes must be in her paws, she can only see things by touching them.'

Only by touching would I find out what that effigy was made of, but if the parish priest were suddenly to appear and catch me he would not be pleased. I looked around me. The church was still empty, so I furtively stretched out my hand to touch St Teresa's face.

But before I could do so, two girls entered the church. Heading in my direction, they came and joined me beside the coffin. Both girls had a worried expression. We stood there in silence. Until one of the girls said to the other:

– 'I wonder when that lot are going to turn up for gran's funeral. We can't keep her lying here in church forever!'

No sooner had she spoken than I understood. Feeling quite sick, I realized this was not St Teresa after all but the corpse of an old woman. I had been about to touch a corpse. Almost. Saved just in time, when the old woman's granddaughters unexpectedly arrived.

The very idea that I had almost touched a corpse made me go weak at the knees. I struggled to the nearest pew where I slumped down, feeling faint, and barely conscious. My heart was beating in all the wrong places: in my wrists, head and knees, as well as in my breast.

I could sense the pallor of my lips beneath my lipstick. Nor could I understand all this panic simply because I had almost touched a corpse – since death is part of life. Without death, life is incomprehensible, yet I had almost fainted upon touching what was also mine. I felt I had to get out of that church but could not stand. At last, after forcing myself, I struggled to my feet and staring straight ahead of me, I made for the door.

How can I explain what I saw outside? Already feeling dazed, I felt even more dazed as I walked out into the bright sunshine and bustling atmosphere with cars rushing past and everyone alive, so alive – only the old woman was dead although I myself had almost died after inhaling the perfume of those red flowers covering the feet of death.

Out on the street, I stood for ages inhaling the smell of life. It is a combination of flesh, of body odour and petrol, sea-breezes and perspiration under armpits: the smell of what still has to die.

I then hailed a taxi to take me home. I climbed in, pale and shaken, but as much alive as a fresh rose-bud.`

SEA-BATHING

My father was a great believer in sea-bathing during the summer months. And how I loved those outings to the seaside at Olinda near Recife.

My father also believed that the best time for sea-bathing was before sunrise. Difficult to describe my sense of wonder as we boarded an empty tram in the dark in order to reach Olinda before the sun came up.

Even although I had been to bed, my heart would stay awake with sheer anticipation. Feeling terribly excited, I would jump out of bed just after four and awaken my sisters. We would dress quickly and leave without breakfast. Father believed one should always bathe on an empty stomach.

We would walk through the dark streets shivering in the early morning breeze. Then wait for the tram to arrive. Until at long last we could hear it rumbling towards us from a distance. I would sit right on the edge of my seat and begin to feel happy. Crossing the city in darkness brought feelings I would never again experience. Inside the tram itself there was more light as dawn began casting its first rays upon us and upon the world.

I looked at everything: the odd person on the street, the journey through the countryside with animals to be seen everywhere. 'Look, a real pig!' I once exclaimed, and that cry of ecstasy became a family joke and thereafter my sisters would often tease me by calling out: 'Look, a real pig!'

We passed magnificent horses just standing there in the fields, waiting for dawn.

I do not know about the childhood of others. But this trip to Olinda every morning gave me such happiness. And helped me believe in future happiness. My capacity for happiness was unfolding. And amidst the unhappiness of my childhood, I clung to this daily trip as if I were travelling to some enchanted island.

Dawn broke inside the tram. And my heart would beat faster as we approached Olinda. Having finally reached our destination, we jumped down and headed for the bathing-huts, trampling soil that was already a mixture of sand and weeds. We changed in the huts. And no body ever flowered like mine as I stepped

onto the beach in anticipation of what awaited me. The sea at Olinda could be dangerous. The water was shallow for a bit, then there was a sudden drop of at least two metres.

There were other people there who believed in bathing before sunrise. And a lifeguard who, for a pittance, would accompany the women into the water. He would stretch out his arms and, supporting a woman on each arm, he would protect them from the strong waves.

The smell of the sea penetrated and intoxicated me. Seaweed floated on the surface. I can see just how difficult it is to express what that sea-bathing on an empty stomach meant to me in terms of pure life as the pale sun rose on the horizon. I become so emotional that I cannot write. The sea at Olinda was salty and rich in iodine. And I did what I would always do: holding my hands together in the form of a shell I would plunge them into the sea and bring some water to my lips. I drank that water each morning, in my desire to be united with the sea.

We never stayed for long. Once the sun had risen it was time to leave, because father always arrived early for work. We dressed quickly, our clothes impregnated with brine. My hair was matted with salt.

Then we stood in the wind, waiting for the tram arriving from Recife. Back inside the tram, my hair soon dried out, caked with salt. From time to time I would lick my arm to taste that thick coating of salt and iodine.

We reached home and only then did we have our breakfast. And when I remembered that I would be going back to the seaside next morning, I grew solemn at the thought of all that adventure and good fortune.

My father believed we should not shower immediately with fresh water but insisted that we allow the effect of the salt-water to work on our skin for several hours. And I was always reluctant to take a shower which would wash away the salt and iodine and remove all traces of the sea.

Who can restore that happiness? How can I renew that sensation of radiant innocence beneath the crimson glow of sunrise? Never more?

Never more.

Never.

ANGUISHED PROTECTION

She could not bear to look at her father when he was happy. For at such moments, this strong, embittered man would become entirely innocent. And so defenceless. Oh God, how he would forget he was mortal. And oblige her, a mere child, to cope with the heavy responsibility of knowing that even our most innocent animal pleasures die. At such moments when he forgot he was going to die, her father transformed her into the *Pietà*, the mother of man.

EARTH'S SWEETNESS

I do not know if many people have made this discovery – but I know that I have. I also know that *to discover land* is a platitude which has long been divorced from what it expresses. But everyone should try at some time or other to rediscover the sensation that underlies the expression: *to discover land.*

I once had this experience in Italy while making a train journey. It need not be Italy. It could even happen in Jacarepaguá. But this was in Italy. The train was speeding along and, after a sleepless night in the company of a Swedish woman who spoke nothing but Swedish and a miserable cup of stale coffee smelling of railway stations, suddenly we were passing through countryside. The sweet Italian countryside. It was early spring, the month of March. Nor does it have to be spring. It only has to be – earth. And for that matter, we all have earth under our feet. Yet it was so strange to feel oneself living on top of a living thing. When feeling nervous, the French say they are *sur le qui-vive.* We are perpetually on top of what is living.

And to earth we shall return. Oh, why were we not allowed to discover for ourselves that we shall return to the earth? We were warned before being able to discover this for ourselves. It cost me considerable effort to discover that: to earth we shall return. The discovery caused me no sadness, it was exciting. Just thinking about it made me feel myself surrounded by the earth's silence. By this silence which we foresee and seek out

before time becomes a reality.

Somehow everything is made of earth. A precious substance. Its abundance does not make it any less strange to feel – for it is so very difficult to feel that everything is really made of earth. Such unity. And why not the soul as well? My soul is woven from the finest earth. And is the flower not made of earth?

And since everything is made of earth – what a wondrous, inexhaustible future we possess. An impersonal future which surpasses us. Just as the human race surpasses us.

Earth showed her bounty by separating us into persons – we have repaid her by being nothing other than earth. We are immortal. And I feel moved and committed.

NOT TO UNDERSTAND

I do not understand. That phrase is so overwhelming that it transcends any understanding. Our understanding is always limited. But not to understand can be without frontiers. I feel myself much more complete when I do not understand. Not to understand, in the sense I mean, is a gift. I am not referring to the simple-minded. The desirable thing is to be intelligent and not to understand. It is a strange blessing, like experiencing madness without being insane. It is quiet indifference, an idiotic gentleness. Apart from the occasional moment of disquiet: I should like to understand a little. Not too much: but at least to understand that I do not understand.

ALCEU AMOROSO LIMA (I)

– Dr Alceu, I was so delighted to be able to speak to you on the telephone that I could scarcely get the words out. And when I heard your frank and effusive expression of pleasure on hearing my voice, I felt there and then that I was both giving and receiving, and there is no greater human gesture. It is difficult to know which questions I should ask you, there is so much you could teach me. You are the perfectly contented man who feels the weight of human suffering. But let us get down to the facts. What were the main problems debated by the Vatican Commission for Justice and Peace?

– So far there have been more problems about internal organization than outward action. And it is worth mentioning that this is a commission of scholars, *Commissio Studiosorum Justitia et Pax*, interested in questions regarding justice and peace rather than in any direct action. That will be the responsibility of the national commissions already being set up. Here in Brazil we are still at the drafting stage, whereas in countries like the United States, France, Holland, Germany and Venezuela, they are already at work. Their job, like that of the central commission in Rome, is to investigate concrete problems relating to Justice and Peace, and to disseminate by means of legislation and practical measures the ideals embodied in the Vatican Encyclicals, especially in *Populorum Progressio*.

– What is your attitude to the problem of contraceptive pills? Bearing in mind that poor people do not have the means to support a family, yet are the ones who have most children.

– One only has to compare the text of *Humanae Vitae* with that of *Casti Connubii*, promulgated in 1930, in order to see how far the Roman Catholic Church has progressed in its efforts to solve the problem of procreation within marriage. Begetting children was always considered to be the first and foremost objective of conjugal union. Now reciprocal love and fidelity have rightly come to be considered as the main objectives of holy matrimony. The principle of responsible fatherhood is now held to be just as important as the question of conscience in deciding how many children a couple should have, and this has been clearly stated

in *Populorum Progressio* and subsequently reaffirmed by bishops at conferences held in the United States, France, Germany, Holland, and even England. The Synod convened for next October hopes to clarify certain ambiguous clauses in the Encyclical. The Synod will discuss the findings of the bishops at the various conventions and the weight of public opinion in different countries. And they will certainly address themselves to the social problems you have mentioned. Just as Pius XII came out in defence of painless childbirth, which for so long was considered contrary to natural and divine law, responsible fatherhood and a rational attitude to procreation are now seen as desirable. God's law already states that each species should multiply according to its own nature: animals in an instinctive and quantitative way; human beings in a rational and qualitative manner.

ALCEU AMOROSO LIMA (II)

– *What in your opinion are Brazil's most pressing problems as an underdeveloped country?*

– Brazil is an underdeveloped country, or in the process of being developed, as those people would say who dislike the term 'underdeveloped', and at the same time the country is underpopulated. The problem of birth control here in Brazil affects the upper classes most of all. They feel themselves to be under attack by any literal or restrictive interpretation of the Encyclical because it is the middle and upper classes who practise birth control, and not the poor. Our main concern is to defend the birth-rate from the point of view of economics and health. To encourage instinctive procreation without creating the right economic and sanitary conditions in order to ensure the protection of human life would only perpetuate situations of intolerable injustice. This defence of the birth-rate is one of the most urgent problems here in Brazil if we are to avoid Malthusian theories being imposed from abroad in exchange for financial aid. Such theories would be wholly unacceptable.

– *Some people argue that Psychoanalysis is worthless and that it is cheaper and easier to go to confession. I myself believe that Psychoanalysis and the Confessional have two quite separate functions. What is your opinion?*

– I agree with you. Although there may be some features common to both, especially on the psychological plane, the differences between them are more striking than any similarities. Because unless we regard confession as being on what is primarily a supernatural plane, the sacrament loses all meaning and simply becomes some inferior form of psychoanalysis of dubious value. Personally, I have no interest in psychoanalysis as a form of treatment and I can even see certain dangers if it were to be abused. We must look at the problem in purely pragmatic terms. If psychoanalysis proves to be successful in certain cases, then there is no reason why it should not be used, and in some instances it might even be considered essential. I simply wish to avoid any generalization. Men like Afrânio Peixoto and Miguel Couto were sceptical about certain forms of treatment

which were common in their time. But as Peixoto would say, ironically: 'Let's try them so long as they cure us.'

– *Orthodox Catholic priests, Protestant ministers and rabbis marry without losing their faith in God or mankind, and without ceasing to mediate between God and human beings who suffer with the odd moment of happiness. Why do Catholic priests not marry?*

– It is a question of traditional discipline rather than doctrine. That is why this rule was only introduced into the Catholic Church in the Third or Fourth Century and could be changed at any time. I am confident that in the not too distant future there will be a distinction between secular priests, who will not be obliged to observe the vow of celibacy, and monks who, in pursuit of greater perfection, will spontaneously opt for celibacy. Nietzsche always claimed that the greatest strength of the Roman Catholic Church was the celibacy of her priests. But marriage in itself will never be a serious impediment to the priestly mission of mediation between God and men. Just as voluntary celibacy and, above all, virginity, will continue to be incomparable forms of moral elevation and spiritual perfection.

– *Have you yourself ever felt that your ideas were in conflict with those of Catholic doctrine?*

– I only experienced real freedom after embracing the Roman Catholic faith, despite some initial difficulties. And I am not playing with words. It is important not to confuse freedom with whims or changing moods. Or to confuse Roman Catholic doctrine with individual interpretations with which we are free to disagree. For within the Church we are quite free to disagree. The Pope himself, as everyone knows, is only infallible within certain limits and in specific cases. Although his universal authority as Supreme Pontiff is essential if that freedom is to be exercised within the Church.

ALCEU AMOROSO LIMA (III)

– *Has your faith in God been an act of faith or a slow apprenticeship?*

– A lengthy search crowned by an act of grace. And that is what matters in the end. And what lasts.

– *Do you believe that only by turning to religion can young people today hope to solve their problems?*

– No. Whether as an individual or as a member of society, one cannot dissociate religious life from domestic, cultural, economic and political life. Nor can there be religious life in any real sense unless one's economic, cultural and domestic life is in good order.

– *But if we are part of divine creation and controlled by God, what does man's free will consist of?*

– Man's true greatness stems from the fact that he is the only creature on earth who has the freedom to deny God. And by the same token, man enjoys the privilege of being able to recognize God of his own free will. And of being able to adore Him.

– *What part did you play in the recent Congress of Laymen convened by the Vatican?*

– I found out just how little I know.

– *What is the difference between a great Catholic leader and a saint? Should the latter, for example, make vows of chastity and poverty and renounce the pleasures of this world?*

– Sanctity implies always doing God's will and, above all, in knowing where that will lies. That is why pride and avarice are greater obstacles to the most meagre sanctity in this world than any attack on the vows of chastity and poverty, or any renunciation of earthly pleasures.

– *Have you ever felt yourself to be in a state of grace? For I must confess in all humility that I have on more than one occasion. And how I long to renew the experience, yet I have already received so much grace that I do not feel I can ask for any more.*

– For me every moment of total detachment from earthly things is a state of grace. I can feel it like the presence of God Who is as ineffable and elusive as Silence. That is why some days are

full of grace. And some weeks devoid of grace. But never entirely, and the important thing is to keep the window open as we wait. Grace always descends unexpectedly and brings supernatural Inspiration to all, whether they be ordinary mortals or poets about to put pen to paper.

– *How do you feel about your role as a teacher? Do you find teaching more rewarding than writing?*

– I have always enjoyed teaching and miss being with my university students. But I have always regarded teaching as a form of poetic creation.

– *Do you feel bewildered by the modern world?*

– I must confess that I don't, although I often find it disturbing.

– *How did you feel about the first man landing on the moon?*

– I was no more than a boy in 1909 when I read in a Berlin newspaper that Blériot had crossed the English Channel by plane! *'Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coute...'*

– *Dr Alceu, I once approached you in the hope that you would teach me how to live. I found it as difficult then as I do now. You said things which made a deep impression which I do not intend to repeat here, and begged me not to hesitate to get in touch whenever I needed you. Well, I need you now. And I was also hoping that you might be able to explain what is expected of me as a writer.*

– Clarice, you belong to that tragic breed of writers who, strictly speaking, do not write their own books. *The books write themselves.* You are the author's main protagonist in your novels. And, as you well know, that author is not of this world...

– *What contribution can an intellectual make in an underdeveloped country's regime?*

– Suffer in silence but never give up protesting.

– *What do you think of the present divisions in the Church?*

– The Church has always struggled from one crisis to another. As human history and events accelerate, the state of crisis also intensifies within the Church as she tries to reappraise her spiritual role in a much changed society. But this is proof of the Church's strength rather than of her decline. And the Church has never been more vigorous than at present as she strives to carry out radical reforms and fights the persecution of her missionaries.

– *And the divisions among Catholics themselves?*

– These, too, are further proof of the freedom we enjoy within the Church. So long as there is conflict between conservatives

and innovators or, as some would put it, between reactionaries and progressives, and I count myself among the latter, the Roman Catholic faith is still alive and well. The real danger would be if one of those rival groups were to gain the upper hand and try to dominate the other, thus suppressing the co-existence of two opposed or different factions within the same House, which is the universe itself. For, were the Church to cease being *universal*, she would no longer be Catholic. If the Church were to suppress the right to disagree respectfully within her ranks, there would be no union of free men but only a totalitarian uniformity of robots.

– *How do you rate contemporary Brazilian literature?*

– I think we are still influenced by the changes brought about by the Modernist Revolution in 1922. Centuries succeed each other, it is true, without repeating themselves. But the twentieth century is bound to diverge from the nineteenth century, which saw two great moments of renewal between 1830 and 1840, then between 1880 and 1890. In the 1830s, there was a transition from Classicism to Romanticism; in the 1890s, from Realism to Symbolism. In the twentieth century there was the literary revolution of the 1920s. Could it be that the next revolution will also take place in the 1980s? An *audiovisual* revolution perhaps, when written literature will become oral and visual, just as Modernism in the twenties saw a literary transition from logic to magic. Since I will not be here in the 1980s, you will have to tell me if there is any truth in that prophecy...

– *Have you any publications planned for 1969?*

– Nothing new, but almost certainly several anthologies of items dispersed elsewhere and a series of essays which have been out of print for some years now.

– *What is the greatest compliment you have ever been paid?*

– That was when I was taking a difficult bend on the main road from Rio to Petrópolis. The rain was bucketing down, the road was congested with traffic, and there was fog. I made a dangerous manoeuvre and heard one of my young sons saying to the other: 'The old boy is *really* wild...' but that was a very long time ago.

SO SENSITIVE

This was when she went through a crisis which seemed to have nothing to do with her life – a crisis of deep compassion. Her head was so narrow, her hair so neatly combed, that it could scarcely support all that compassion. She could not bring herself to look at a tenor while he was singing. She would turn her face away, pained, unable to bear it, unable to watch the singer being applauded. And sometimes she would press her gloved hands to her bosom, overcome with remorse. She suffered without recompense, without so much as feeling sorry for herself. Until one day she was cured like a wound which had healed.

It was this same woman, who suffered from sensitivity as if it were a disease, who chose a Sunday when her husband was away from home to go out and look for a seamstress who could do fine embroidery. It was more of an outing. What could anyone have against it? Besides, she often took a stroll. As if she were still a little girl walking along the pavement. Especially when she *felt* her husband was betraying her.

So off she went one Sunday morning to look for a seamstress. She found herself walking down a muddy track full of chickens and naked urchins. The seamstress lived in a house with a brood of starving children and a husband dying of tuberculosis. She told the seamstress what she wanted but the seamstress refused to make her a blouse that needed cross-stitching. She hated doing cross-stitching!

The woman left, outraged and puzzled by the seamstress's refusal. She *felt* almost unclean in the morning heat. And ever since childhood, she had always liked to think of herself as being scrupulously clean.

Back in her own house, she had lunch, then lay down in the semi-darkness of her bedroom, thinking mature thoughts devoid of any resentment. At least for once she was not *feeling* anything. Apart from this waiting. In semi-darkness.

LABYRINTH

When he says he is wasting time, the others understand what he means. But sometimes he happens to feel that he is wasting time – and then says nothing because the others are not likely to understand. Take today, for example. The day has passed. This surprises him as much as if he had not thought this day the thought that could only have come today. Anything he might have thought or done today, he could not possibly have thought or done either yesterday or tomorrow, because there is a time for roses, another for melons, and one should not eat strawberries except during the season for strawberries. He felt that there was a time corresponding to each moment which could not be postponed. He was determined to make this kind of hour correspond to his own hour so that it should not be lost.

When he perceived, moreover, that the expression *to waste time* offered no explanation, he chose another expression which momentarily corresponded to the truth: *to take advantage of one's youth*. But this only corresponded to the truth momentarily. The expression *to take advantage of one's youth* began to assume a meaning of its own – and he began to take advantage of his youth in a way that was not of his own choosing. And he was never able to explain how he had come to lose himself in this labyrinth. Does youth mean women? I really cannot say.

WHO WROTE THIS?

I was looking through some old files when I came across a piece of paper on which I had jotted down the following lines in English. I wonder what led me to write down this moving passage. To my shame, I forgot to identify the author. Even as I re-read the words I find them very moving.

'Then, for a moment, both of them faded into the gentle darkness which was so deep that they became darker than darkness; for several seconds, they were darker than the black trees, and then it became so dark that, when she tried to raise her eyes to his, all she could see were the tempestuous waves of the universe above his shoulders, as she told him: Yes, I believe I love you, too.'

SERIOUS QUESTIONS

People who have read my books seem to think that by writing for a newspaper I might be tempted to make what one might call concessions. And many have said to me: 'Be yourself.'

Several days ago, on hearing those words 'Be yourself', I suddenly felt puzzled and at a loss. Terrifying questions came to mind: Who am I? How am I? What am I? Who is the real me? Do I really exist?

But these questions were greater than me.

A HAPPY MAN

Not so long ago I took a taxi and lit a cigarette. When we stopped at the traffic lights, the driver asked me:

– Have you a match by any chance, lady?

I handed him the box and as he returned it, but before he could thank me, without really thinking I said out of habit:

– Don't mention it.

Whereupon he replied:

– I haven't thanked you yet. Why did you say 'Don't mention it'?

– Oh, it's not important.

– Excuse me, but it is important. You should have waited until I thanked you before saying 'Don't mention it'.

– It really doesn't matter, I insisted, somewhat surprised.

– Of course it matters. His tone was that of a man defending sacred laws which had suddenly been violated. It was as if he had trodden on dangerous territory. I took a closer look at him, and saw just how little freedom he enjoyed and how much he needed to feel himself imprisoned, and others, too. I then tried to make amends by speaking to him gently:

– Really, young man, it isn't all that important...

But he was not to be appeased:

– Next time, lady, you wait until you're thanked.

There was nothing more to be done. His stubborn attitude was beginning to irritate me. For the rest of the journey we did not speak. And if ever there was mute silence, that was it.

I am what might be called an impulsive person. How can I describe it? Probably like this: I get an idea or feeling, and instead of reflecting a little, I act almost immediately. This can lead to one of two things: sometimes I act in response to some intuition because I know it cannot fail; at other times it turns out to be a mistake which proves I was not responding to intuition but to some childish whim.

The question is whether I should go on following my impulses. And to what extent I can control them. There is a problem: if I spend too much time thinking, I cease to act. And then I realize when it is already too late that I should have acted. *I am in an impasse.* I want to improve but do not know how. Under the influence of certain impulses, I have done some people good. But there are times when I have been badly hurt through being impulsive. Besides, my impulses have not always been well-motivated. For example, when I have given way to wrath. The kind of wrath one should try to resist. But as a friend once pointed out: my wrath is sometimes *sacred.* My *benevolence* is sometimes weakness and at other times beneficial to others and to me. Curbing my impulses sometimes defeats and depresses me; at other times, by curbing them I experience an inner strength.

What am I to do then? Should I go on getting things right and wrong, and accept the consequences? Or should I struggle and become more mature? I am also afraid of becoming too mature for then I should lose the sheer joy of this childish game. I must think about this. Which will almost certainly provoke another impulse. I am still not mature enough. And perhaps never will be.

BLACK DOES

Africa. The towns of Tallah, Kebbe and Sasstown, inside Liberia, with the journalist Ana Kipper and Captains Crockett and Bill Young. Missionaries had still not set foot there. Some of the inhabitants had worked at the air-base and spoke a few words of English as if it were just another dialect. In Monrovia alone there are twenty-four or twenty-five local dialects. In the midst of a conversation they will suddenly pause and, pronouncing the word carefully and with obvious pleasure, say *Hello* – they listen attentively to the resonance of the word they have just spoken, give a hearty laugh, then continue with what they were saying. They love saying good-bye. Their skin is a smooth, matt black and appears to repel water like the swan that never gets wet. The children have navels the size of an orange. I find myself being closely scrutinized by a black youth and, not quite knowing how I should react, I end up saying good-bye. The boy is delighted. With the utmost concentration, as if he were performing some delicate ritual, he begins making obscene gestures without any loss of innocence. The young black girls daub their faces with streaks of ochre and paint their lower lip the colour of gangrene and verdigris. One of the girls whose baby I stop to admire says: 'Baby nice, baby cry money' – and her voice is so harmonious that it sounds like water splashing into a pitcher. Captain Young gives her a nickel. 'Baby cry big big money', she protests, emptying the pitcher with that laughing voice of hers. These natives are forever laughing, even those who look melancholy. There is no hint of scorn or aggression in their laughter which is a mixture of fascination, a desire to please, humility, curiosity and happiness. One of the girls stares at me so intently that I start feeling embarrassed. And then without any warning she breaks out into a long rigmarole, a harangue devoid of anger. I cannot make out a single re or sol, nothing at all except variations on the note la, as her voice rises and falls amidst the gibberish. I turn to the interpreter. And he gives me a brief summary: 'She likes you.' Whereupon the girl breaks out into another rigmarole and this time her voice fills several pitchers with melodious water. The interpreter points to my headscarf. I remove it

and show the girl how the knot is tied. When I look round, I find myself surrounded by black girls, semi-naked, all very solemn and quiet. No one is paying any attention to the demonstration and I begin to feel uncomfortable, surrounded by all these black does. The stripes on their opaque faces seem to be watching me. Their gentleness is contagious: I also find myself becoming calm and gentle. One of the girls approaches me on tiptoe and, as if performing some secret rite – they attach so much importance to form – she takes my head in her hands, strokes my hair, feels its texture, totally absorbed. The others gather round to watch. I keep quite still to avoid frightening them. When she has finished, the silence continues for a moment. And suddenly they are all laughing with variations on the note la and giving startled cries of glee as if silence had been banished.

THE PERILOUS ADVENTURE OF WRITING

'My intuitions become clearer as I struggle to transpose them into words.' That is what I once wrote. But I was wrong. Because, as one writes those intuitions, they adhere and stick. It is risky, for one never knows what will happen – if one has been sincere. There might be a warning of destruction, even self-destruction by means of words. Memories one would rather forget might come flooding back. The climate might become apocalyptic. The heart must remain pure to make way for intuition. And when, dear God, can one say that the heart is pure? For purity is difficult to ascertain. The greatest purity of flesh and spirit can sometimes be found in illicit love, a love blessed by no priest, only by love itself. All this one can see – and to have seen is irrevocable. Intuition is not to be toyed with, writing is not to be treated as a game. For the chase can mortally wound the hunter.

A LIGHTNING INTERVIEW WITH PABLO NERUDA (I)

I arrived at the block of flats where Pablo Neruda and his wife Matilde were expected as the guests of Rubem Braga. I reached the main entrance just as their car arrived and suitcases were being unloaded. Rubem Braga quipped: 'All that literary baggage is quite a weight.' Whereupon the poet replied: 'My literary baggage probably weighs no more than several kilos.'

Neruda is most agreeable, especially when he wears his cap. ('I haven't much hair left, but I have plenty of caps', he assured us.) As a poet, however, he takes himself seriously. He warned me that if I wanted an interview that same evening he would only answer three questions, but if I cared to return next morning, he would answer many more. He then asked to see the questions I had prepared. Feeling very unsure of myself, I handed him the sheet of paper on which I had written down my questions, hoping for who knows what answers. But that *what* gave me comfort. He approved of my questions and said he would expect me next morning. I left feeling very relieved because the ordeal of asking questions had been postponed. But I am audacious despite being timid, I have always been so, and this has brought vexations as well as some rewards. Anyone who suffers from being *audaciously timid* will know what I mean.

Before giving you the details of our conversation, here is a brief outline of Neruda's literary achievements. He published *Crepusculario [Shades of Twilight]* when he was nineteen years of age. The following year saw the publication of *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada [Twenty Love Poems and A Song of Despair]*, love poems which continue to be reprinted, re-read and greatly admired. Then followed *Residencia en la tierra [Residence on Earth]* which includes all the poems written between 1925 and 1931, the poet's so-called Surrealist phase. *La tercera residencia [The Third Residence]* has all the poems belonging to his middle period (1931-1945) and also includes *España en el corazón [Spain in my Heart]* written in 1938, a long poem lamenting the death of Lorca and denouncing the Spanish Civil War. These events affected him deeply and sharpened his awareness of contemporary political and social problems.

Published in 1950, Neruda's *Canto general [Song of The Universe]* is an attempt to embrace all the political, social and ethical problems of Latin America. The *Odas elementales [Elemental Odes]*, which were first published in 1954, reveal greater simplicity and restraint as the poet celebrates nature and its produce, such as the humble onion in 'Oda a la cebolla' ['Ode to the Onion']. Two further collections: *Nuevas odas elementales [New Elemental Odes*, 1956] and *Tercer libro de las odas [The Third Book of Odes*, 1957], are in much the same vein. From 1958 onwards, Neruda kept up a steady output of new poems, notably in collections such as: *Estravagario [Extravagaria], Navegaciones y regresos [Voyages and Homecomings], Cien sonetos de amor [One Hundred Love Sonnets], Cantos ceremoniales [Ceremonial Songs]* and *Memorial de Isla Negra [Notes from Isla Negra]*.

Next morning I went to see him as arranged. Unfortunately he had already written the answers to my questions, because these nearly always provoke further questions in an interview and sometimes lead to the question one wanted to ask in the first place. Neruda's replies could not have been more concise and there is nothing more frustrating than short answers to lengthy questions.

I told him how nervous I was of conducting interviews, whereupon he told me: 'Don't be silly!'

I asked him which of his books he liked most and why. He replied:

– As you must know, all the books we write give us some satisfaction because we – you and I – are the people who wrote them.

– Do you consider yourself a Chilean or a Latin American poet?

– A local poet from Chile, a provincial poet from Latin America.

– How would you define anguish? I inquired.

– You are talking to a contented man – he replied.

LIGHTNING INTERVIEW WITH PABLO NERUDA (II)

– Does writing make the anguish of living more bearable?

– Yes, of course. Exercising your profession, if you enjoy it, is sheer bliss. Otherwise it is sheer hell.

– Who is God?

– Sometimes everybody. Always nothing.

– How can one best describe a human being?

– Political, poetic. And physical.

– What is your idea of a beautiful woman?

– One who embodies many women.

– Write down your favourite poem, that is to say your favourite poem at this very moment.

– I am writing. Can you spare me ten years?

– Where would you like to live if you were not living in Chile?

– You may think me foolish and excessively patriotic, but as I once stated in a poem:

Were I to be born a thousand times over,
This is where I would wish to be born.
Were I to die a thousand times over,
That is where I would wish to die...

– What has been your greatest satisfaction as a writer?

– To be able to read my verses to ordinary people in the remotest places: to miners in the desert regions of Northern Chile, to wool-shearers in the Magellan Straits in a shed smelling of unwashed wool, sweat and solitude.

– Are your moments of creative inspiration preceded by anguish or a state of grace?

– I experience no such feelings. Yet I would not call myself an insensitive person.

– Say something to surprise me.

– 748.

(And he really did surprise me with the unexpected resonance of those numbers.)

– What are your views on contemporary Brazilian poetry? Which of our poets do you prefer?

– I admire Drummond, Vinícius de Morais and your religious poet, Jorge de Lima, who reminds me of Claudel. I am not familiar

with the work of younger poets in Brazil, that is to say poets after the generation of Paulo Mendes Campos and Geir Campos. One poem I greatly admire is 'O Defunto' [The Deceased] by Pedro Nava. I read it aloud to friends everywhere.

– How do you feel about literature of commitment?

– All literature is committed.

– Which of your own books do you like best?

– The next one.

– Can you explain why readers often refer to you as 'The Volcano of Latin America'?

– That is news to me. They have probably never experienced a volcano.

– What is your most recent poem?

– 'Fim do Mundo' [End of the World]. It is about the twentieth century.

– How does the creative process develop in your case?

– With pen and paper. At least that is the method I follow.

– Do you find reviews by the critics constructive?

– Perhaps for others, but not for the writer.

– Have you ever written a poem to order? Could you compose one now, however short?

– Lots of them. Some of my best poems. Here is the poem you asked for.

– Was the name Neruda accidental or inspired by Jan Neruda, the poet of the Czech freedom movement?

– No one has ever been able to verify this matter.

– What is the most important thing in the world?

– To try and make the world a worthy place for everyone, not just for the privileged few.

– What do you desire most of all for yourself?

– That depends on the hour of the day.

– What is love? Any type of love?

– The best definition is simply: Love is love.

– Have you suffered much for love?

– I am prepared to suffer even more.

– How long would you like to spend here in Brazil?

– A year, but much depends on my work.

And thus ended my interview with Pablo Neruda. I wish he had been prepared to say more. I could have carried on almost indefinitely even if only to be given the briefest of replies. He offered me a copy of his book: *Cien sonetos de amor* [One Hundred Love Sonnets]. And after writing my name he wrote:

'From your friend Pablo'. I, too, felt that we could have become close friends in more favourable circumstances. On the back cover of his book, the blurb says: 'Everything is manifest with an aura of innocent, pagan sensuality: love is seen as man's vocation and poetry as his mission.'

Those words sum up the essential qualities of Pablo Neruda.

FREEDOM

This was an awkward dialogue. On the surface it seemed unimportant but, in effect, was most revealing.

– Mummy, push that hair off your forehead.

– That's my fringe.

– You look ugly with your hair hanging down.

– Surely I can please myself how I look.

– No, you can't.

– Yes, I can.

– Oh no, you can't.

And that was how the argument started. The reason was not silly, it was serious. Someone, my son, as it happened, was trying to curb my freedom. And I was not prepared to take it, not from my own son. I felt tempted to allow my fringe to grow until it covered my entire forehead. I felt like locking myself away in my room and pleasing myself, however ugly I might look. No, not 'however ugly'; I wanted to be downright ugly, and so assert my freedom. At the same time, I realized that my son also had the right to expect his mother not to go round looking ugly. This was a clash between two people revindicating who knows what? God alone knows. So we left it at that.

IN GREECE

Late one night, I telephoned a friend and told her:

– Go to the window and look at the Acropolis under the full moon.

She replied in a sleepy voice:

– I've seen it already. The Acropolis is beautiful, towering there in all its splendour.

I told her:

– Now turn over and go to sleep.

I shall end up in Greece under the moonlight.

CHARLATANS

A friend of mine once remarked that there is something of the charlatan in all of us. I had to agree. I can feel the charlatan inside me, haunting me. Without getting the better of me, firstly because it is not really true, secondly because I am almost sickened by my basic honesty. There is another thing which haunts me and makes me smile: bad taste. Oh, how tempted I feel to give in to bad taste. In what way? Well, here there is plenty of scope, endless scope. It can be anything from saying the wrong thing at the worst possible moment to uttering words of great beauty and truth which catch the other person off guard and leave him speechless. In what other way? Well, the way one dresses, for example. Not simply by overdressing. I cannot describe it but know exactly what I mean by dressing in bad taste. And when it comes to writing? Here there are great temptations because the dividing line between bad taste and truth is almost imperceptible. In writing, moreover, there is an accepted standard of *good taste* which is actually much worse than bad taste. Just to amuse myself or, as a simple experiment, I sometimes walk that thin line between the two.

Have I ever been a charlatan? Yes, indeed I have, while believing in all sincerity that I was doing the right thing. For example, I graduated in law, thus deceiving myself and others. Perhaps myself rather than others. Yet in all sincerity I decided to study law in the hope of reforming the Brazilian penal system one day.

The charlatan sells himself short. What was I about to say? It was on the tip of my tongue, but has now escaped me. Does the charlatan harm himself? That I do not know, but what is certain is that charlatanism can be very harmful. It disrupts the most solemn moments. It makes you wish you did not exist just when you exist at your most powerful. Alas, I cannot dwell too long on this subject.

Someone told me that a certain critic had described Guimarães Rosa and me as a couple of imposters, in other words, as a couple of charlatans. The critic in question won't understand a word of what I am saying here. For I am speaking of something very profound even if it appears otherwise and I give the impression of toying a little sadly with the subject.

She was dressed in her maid's striped uniform but spoke as if she were the mistress of the household. She watched me climb the stairs laden with parcels, pausing to sit on the stairs because both elevators were out of order. The maid worked on the fifth floor, I lived on the seventh. She walked up with me carrying some of my parcels in one hand and the milk she had just purchased in the other. When we arrived at the fifth floor, she left the milk in her own apartment, using the servants' entrance, and then insisted on helping me to carry my parcels up to the seventh.

There was something very odd about her. She spoke like the mistress of the household, and even looked the part in spite of her maid's uniform. She knew that my apartment had caught fire, expressed her sympathy that I should have suffered so much and told me: Better to feel pain than nothing at all.

– There are certain people – she went on – who never even feel depressed, and have no idea what they are missing.

She then explained, to me of all people, that depression can be very revealing.

And – believe me – she finally added: 'Life must have a sting, otherwise one is not really living.'

Those were her very words and I must confess that I like the word *sting*.

SOCIAL COLUMN

It was a ladies' luncheon. Not only the hostess but every one of her guests seemed to be pleased that it was turning out so well. As if there were always the danger of suddenly discovering that the reality of dumb-waiters, flowers, and all this elegance was a little above them – not in terms of social status but simply: above them. Perhaps because they were simply women and not just ladies. But if they were all entitled to this ambience, they still seemed apprehensive about committing some *faux-pas*. A *faux-pas* is that moment when a certain reality comes to light.

The lunch was elegantly served with no hint of the anxious preparations in the kitchen beforehand. When the guests arrived, all the tell-tale signs of frantic activity had been carefully removed.

Which did not prevent each of the guests from having some little reservation or other about the luncheon while pretending everything was perfect. One lady in particular had to show forbearance every time the waiter served her neighbour and lightly brushed against her coiffure, giving her the kind of fright which presages catastrophe. There were two waiters. The one who was serving this lady remained invisible as he served her from behind. And there is no reason to believe he caught a glimpse of her expression. Without any likelihood of their ever getting to know each other, a relationship was established through those periodic brushes with her coiffure. And he could sense it. Through that coiffure he could feel her mounting hatred until he himself began to feel enraged.

One must assume that every one of the guests had her own little moment of crisis during this formal gathering. Each of them must have sensed, however momentarily, this acute and imminent danger of their coiffure coming apart and throwing the luncheon into chaos.

The hostess exuded an air of calm authority which rather suited her. From time to time, however, she would forget she was being observed and adopt some surprising expressions: a sudden look of weariness or annoyance. And at one point – who knows what vague and anguished thought was passing through

her mind – she stared quite blankly at her neighbour on the right who was speaking to her. The woman remarked: 'The landscape there is wonderful!' And the hostess, in a dreamy tone of voice mingling disquiet and complacency, heartily replied:

– 'Yes, you're right... isn't it lovely?'

The lady who enjoyed herself most of all was Mrs X, the guest of honour, who received so many invitations that she simply treated any luncheon party as lunch. With delicate gestures and completely at her ease, she devoured everything on that French menu with relish – spooning the food into her mouth and then looking round with avid curiosity – the vestiges of childhood.

But all the other guests felt ill at ease. Perhaps if they had tried a little less hard to appear so relaxed, they might have looked more natural. None of them had the courage. Every one of them felt very unsure of herself, as if capable of making the most awful social blunder should she drop her guard. No: they were determined this should be the perfect luncheon.

Nor had they any way of being themselves without the odd moment of silence. And that was not allowed. For no sooner was some topic casually raised than they all pounced ferociously, prolonging the discussion until they all became reticent. And since they exploited every topic in the same fashion – for all of them were up to date with the latest topics – and since they agreed about everything, each topic renewed the possibility of further silence.

Mrs X, a huge woman, healthy as an ox and wearing flowers in her corsage, was fifty years old and recently married. Her ready, excitable laughter was that of a woman who had married late in life. All the others appeared to be of one mind in finding her absurd. And this relieved the tension a little. But she was too obviously absurd for comfort and there had to be something more to her – if only one's chatty neighbour would stop talking and give one time to examine Mrs X more closely. But no such luck. The chatter went on and on.

The worst part of it was that one of the women invited spoke only French. This created difficulties for Mrs Y. She took her revenge when the foreign lady uttered one of those expressions which can be repeated word for word by way of reply with only the slightest change of intonation. '*Il n'est pas mal*', said the foreigner. Whereupon Mrs Y, confident that she was pronouncing it correctly, repeated the expression aloud, with all the surprise and satisfaction of someone who has suddenly discovered: '*Ah*,

il n'est pas mal, il n'est pas mal.' For as another guest, who was not foreign and discussing something else, remarked: '*C'est le ton qui fait la chanson.*'

As for Mrs K, dressed all in grey, she was ever ready to listen and make conversation. She did not mind in the least being somewhat *passée*. She had discovered that discretion was her most effective weapon and exercised it with a certain freedom. 'I'm not going to change my little ways for anyone', those smiling maternal eyes of hers were saying. She had even established a dress code to highlight her discretion, as in the story about the spies who wore badges to show they were spies. And so she dressed in what were unmistakably discreet colours. And her jewellery was no less discreet. Discreet women form a kind of sisterhood. They recognize each other at a glance, and in praising each other, they are praising themselves.

The opening discussion was about dogs. And when the conversation ended with liqueurs after lunch, as if constrained by some mysterious force to close the circle, they were still discussing dogs. Their kind hostess had a dog called José. A name no member of the sisterhood of discreet women would ever have dreamed of giving her dog. They would have chosen a name like Rex, and, even then, at some discreet moment, hasten to explain: 'My little son gave the dog its name.' Members of the sisterhood of discreet women frequently refer to their children as if they were adorable little tyrants around the house. 'My son thinks I look terrible in this dress.' 'My daughter has booked seats for a concert but I don't think I'll go. She can always take her father.' As a rule, the members of the sisterhood of discreet women are only invited because of their husband, almost certainly some influential business man, or their late father, who was probably a famous lawyer.

They rise from the table. Some of the guests fold their napkins before getting to their feet as they were taught to do as children. Those who just leave them lying there unfolded have a theory about leaving them unfolded.

A cup of coffee is welcome after all that rich food, but the liqueurs begin to mix with the wines imbibed earlier, making the guests feel slightly breathless and hazy. Those who smoke, smoke. Those who do not, do not. But they all smoke. The weary hostess never stops smiling. At long last, the guests take their leave. It is already late. Some of the women return home, their afternoon spoiled. Others decide, since they are all dressed up

for the occasion, to visit a friend. Who knows, perhaps to offer their condolences. It's the same the world over, people eat and people die.

On the whole, the luncheon was perfect. My turn to offer lunch next time? Not on your life.

A GRASSHOPPER ALIAS HOPE

An *esperança* (grasshopper) landed here in the house. Not that time-honoured *esperança* (hope) which often turns out to be illusory, yet nevertheless sustains us. But that other *esperança* which is green and real.

One of my little boys let out a yelp:

– An *esperança*! And there it was on the wall right above his chair! His excitement was such that it combined both types of *esperança*. He is still young enough for this. But I was really surprised. My kind of *esperança* is something very private and usually settles right inside me, without anyone noticing and doesn't settled on the wall above my head. Sudden confusion: but beyond a shadow of doubt this was an *esperança* and she could not have been more delicate and green.

– The poor thing has scarcely any body – I lamented.

– She only has a soul – my son explained, and since children are constantly surprising us, I discovered to my dismay that he was referring to both types of *esperança*.

She walked slowly on those long, thin legs between the pictures on the wall, persistently trying to find a way out between two of them. Three times she had to retrace her steps. She needed considerable effort to learn.

– She's stupid – my son scoffed.

– I know – I replied, somewhat distraught.

– Now she's looking for another way out, look at her, poor creature, she can't make up her mind.

– I know, I can see what you mean.

– An *esperança* doesn't seem to have any eyes, Mummy, she's guided by her antennae.

– I know – I replied, feeling increasingly ill at ease.

We remained there for what seemed ages, just looking. Watching the *esperança* as the inhabitants of Rome and Greece used to watch over their hearths to make certain the fire did not go out.

– She's forgotten she can fly, Mummy, and thinks she can only crawl about slowly.

She really was moving slowly – could she be injured by any chance? No, surely not, otherwise there would be signs of blood,

at least that has always been my experience.

Just then a spider, sensing there might be something to eat, emerged from behind a picture. Crawling over her invisible web, the spider appeared to be moving gently through the air. She wanted that grasshopper. But we also wanted her, and certainly not to eat, dear God. My son went to fetch the broom. Confused and uncertain as to whether I was about to lose my *esperança* forever, I said weakly:

– You mustn't kill spiders, they're supposed to bring good fortune...

– But she's going to crush the *esperança*! – my son protested vociferously.

– I must remind the maid to dust behind the pictures – was all I could say, conscious at how disjointed those words sounded and of an unmistakable weariness in my voice. I then began imagining how I would be curt and enigmatic when addressing the maid. I would simply tell her: Please try to make it easier for the *esperança* to move about.

Once the spider had been killed, my son made a pun on the two meanings of *esperança*. My other son who was watching television, overheard him and found it very amusing. There was no doubt: *esperança* had settled in our house, in body and soul.

But such a pretty insect: she settles rather than lives, a delicate, green skeleton, and so fragile that even I, who like touching things, have never attempted to catch one.

In fact, I can remember an *esperança* once landing on my arm and she was so light that I could feel nothing. I was only visually aware of her presence. Her delicacy disconcerted me. I kept my arm still and thought to myself: 'And now what?' In fact, I did nothing. I remained quite still as if a flower had blossomed inside me. And I cannot remember what happened after that. Probably nothing at all.

REBELLION

When they removed the stitches from my hand after they had operated between the fingers, I screamed with pain. I screamed with pain and anger because the pain was an insult to my physical integrity. But I was no fool. I took advantage of my pain and screamed at the past and present. I even screamed at the future, dear God.

SILKEN THREADS

A friend of mine who thought Henry James was a marvellous writer suggested that I should start reading his work. Henry James can be hermetic yet at the same time so lucid. In quoting from one of his essays, I hope my readers won't find me hermetic. That would be most unfortunate. But there are certain things I feel I must express and they are not easy. I suggest you read the following passage several times:

> Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider's web of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chambers of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative – more so when it happens to be that of a man of genius – it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into *revelations*.

Far from being a genius, how many revelations, how many air-borne particles I find myself catching. And that huge spider lurks in the chamber of my consciousness. Ah, how wonderful life is with its ensnaring webs.

Warn me if I start becoming too personal. That is a weakness of mine. But I am also objective. So much so that I can transform those subjective threads of the spider into objective words. Any word, for that matter, is an object and therefore objective. Moreover you may be certain that one does not have to be intelligent: the spider is not intelligent, and as for words, words are inevitable. Do you get my meaning? Never mind. Simply accept what I am offering you. Accept me with silken threads.

NON-ACCEPTANCE

Once she started ageing she preferred to remain indoors. I am convinced she actually thought it was in bad taste to be seen out and about after reaching a certain age: the air outside was so fresh and pure, her body so repugnant with its flabbiness and

wrinkles. The sea in particular was so clear that it looked naked. Others did not mind her presence in public for everyone accepts that people grow old. But she herself found it distasteful. How anxiously she tried to restore the figure she had lost, distress written in those eyes which were still bright.

Another thing: in the old days her face did not betray her thoughts, only her features were accentuated. Now, when she involuntarily glances at herself in the mirror, she almost cries out in horror: I was thinking no such thing! Although it was impossible and hopeless trying to decide what her expression conveyed, just as it was impossible and hopeless trying to explain what she herself was thinking.

All around her things were fresh, a story was about to unfold, and there was wind, wind... Meanwhile her belly sagged and her legs thickened, and her hair had settled into natural drabness.

SUDDEN EASE

Well-being. A most mysterious thing: the food is good, the heart innocent, I encounter a little boy playing ball on the street and I caution him: Mind that ball doesn't hit me, whereupon he replies: I'll be careful. I went to see a film, understood nothing, but felt everything. Should I go back and see it again? Who knows, perhaps I won't be sufficiently relaxed next time and suddenly find myself understanding everything and feeling nothing. I prefer not to take the risk.

I had a friend. She was jealous. And I could not stand it any longer. Her jealousy made her so demanding. So I spoke to her frankly. I warned her she was in danger of spoiling a friendship that could last forever. She was deeply hurt and, purely out of friendship, decided to give me up. As she explained, true friendship is knowing how to make sacrifices. But I had not given her up. Sometime later I telephoned her. We 'worked' at patching up our friendship. We began seeing each other again. And now things are very much better. We are relaxed in each other's company. My friend says she finds me amusing. That does not worry me. It seems that I am sometimes too spontaneous and that makes me amusing. One day, my cook had prepared *canjica* with corn, sugar, cinnamon and coconut milk. My friend adores this delicacy. She happened to call that day and I offered her some. She said it was delicious and asked for a second helping.

Then there are the children. Feeling at ease with one's children. An atmosphere of candour and natural love. And that reminds me of a close friend who went away for the weekend. I missed her but in a nice way. It pleased me to think she was having a well-deserved rest.

And then there was that old friend of mine who I thought might be able to find me some work. He was living in Brasilia. When I tried to telephone, I spoke to someone who sounded like his father. I told him who I was. And his father expressed his delight when he heard my name. I am also learning to accept my own name in this torrent of tranquil happiness, I who always felt so self-conscious about the strangeness of my name that I used to stammer whenever I tried to pronounce it. Just as I am resigning myself to insomnia and getting up in the middle of the night to heat some coffee. The other night the coffee almost scalded my mouth. But I shrugged it off.

And although I rarely visit anyone, I decided on impulse to go and see a friend. On the way I surprised myself by going into a bar and ordering a rum sour flavoured with cashew juice. I rarely drink because alcohol soon goes to my head. I drink far too quickly, then start to feel dazed and sleepy. When I arrived at my friend's house, she had company. Her mother was also there, looking most attractive. Can you see how I am writing at my ease? Without much sense, but at my ease. What does sense matter? I am the sense.

And my younger son is already going to parties. He refuses to tell me what goes on at these parties. And I accept that.

I find myself talking a lot about money these days because I need some badly. But that does not prevent me from taking taxis. And I always chat to the driver. They seem to like it. One taxi-driver told me he had nine children: I thought that was excessive.

And then without shame, I begin to feel rather pleased with myself: a clear sign that I am relaxed.

PASSING THEMES

I feel the urge to write about so many things. Why not? What is stopping me? Perhaps because as themes go, they are so thin, themes which could be exhausted in one word, in a single line. Sometimes it is the fear of touching upon a word which might release thousands of other words and all of them undesirable. Yet I feel this urge to write. Pure impulse – even when I have no theme. As if I already had the canvas, brushes and colours – and all I lack is that cry of freedom, or the essential tranquillity one needs in order to express certain things. Sometimes my silence makes me seek out people who might unwittingly provide me with the key word. But who? Who obliges me to write? That is the mystery: no one. None the less, I still feel this compulsion to write.

I have always wanted to write something which might be exhausted in a single line. For example, about my being disorganized, and then this sudden outburst of feverish organization which grips me like that of the proverbial ant. As if my collective sub-conscious were that of an ant.

I should also like to be able to write a few lines about the passing of physical pain. To describe how the grateful body, still gasping for breath, becomes aware to what extent *soul* is also body.

As if I were about to write a book about the sensation I once felt after being confined to bed for several days with flu. About how I went out again for the first time feeling extremely weak and the sun was warm and there were people on the street. And I found myself exclaiming in a voice which could have been that of an adult or child: Oh, such lovely people. I had emerged from my own darkness into the light which I discovered was also mine. I had emerged from solitude to a world of human beings who moved their arms and legs and had expressions on their faces.

I could also write forever about my feeble resistance to alcohol. I drink far too quickly and there are few alternatives: I either become drowsy and morose, pensive without so much as a clear thought in my head or I become excitable and talk nonsense

with surprising flair. But when I am in this state there comes a moment of revelation about life, about myself, about others, about true art, and a sudden awareness that even the greatest of abstractions are not really abstract. The only drawback about such moments is that I forget them almost immediately. As if this were our pact with God: to see and forget rather than be struck down by knowledge.

And sometimes, however absurd it may sound, I feel entitled to write: Nothing has been invented beyond dying. And then I add the following: dying has to be a natural pleasure, because it is an essential part of nature, whether human, animal or vegetable. Even objects die. And this truth is linked to an even more obvious and alarming discovery: no other form of physical love has ever been invented for this strange, opaque body of ours. Everyone naturally aspires to reproduce the copy which is absolutely original when we truly love. We have returned to the theme of death. And the idea suddenly occurs to me that after death we do not go to *paradise*, dying is *paradise*.

To be truthful, I had no talent for my real vocation: that of being an artist. Because for no good reason, I could draw and paint a horde of ants crawling or standing still – and feel completely fulfilled. Just as I could draw lots of criss-crossing lines and feel that I was being altogether concrete while others might describe them as abstract.

I could also write a whole treatise about eating, given my weakness for good food despite having a small appetite. It would end up being a treatise about sensuality, not in a sexual context, but rather the sensuality of 'coming into close contact' with existence. Eating is one way of making that contact and it somehow absorbs one's entire being.

I could also write about the risible absurdity of my condition. Even while proving that it is worthy and the very mention of that word *worthy* sets me off again into fits of laughter.

I could speak about fruits of every kind. As if I were painting with words. Besides, surely most writing is painting with words?

Alas, there are so many themes I shall never touch on. Meanwhile, they sustain me.

FEAR OF FREEDOM

If I were to spend too long looking at the *Paysage aux Oiseaux Jaunes* by Paul Klee, I should never be able to turn back. Courage and cowardice are a game one never stops playing. This terrifying vision is perhaps beyond redemption, perhaps the vision of freedom itself. This habit we have of staring through the prison bars, the comfort of gripping those cold iron bars with both hands. Cowardice destroys us. For there are those who feel safer in prison with bars to give them support. I then realize that I know few men who are free. I look at the Klee landscape once more and recognize that cowardice and freedom might be in conflict. The entire bourgeoisie collapses on looking at Klee's *Paysage aux Oiseaux Jaunes*. My courage, which is all too real, terrifies me. I even start to think that amongst madmen there are those who are not insane. And that this possibility, which genuinely exists, cannot be explained to the ignorant bourgeoisie. For the more one tries to explain, the more one becomes tongue-tied and exposed to losing one's courage and freedom. *Les Oiseaux Jaunes* does not even plead for our understanding: this step implies still greater freedom: not to be afraid of being misunderstood. Looking at the extreme beauty of those yellow birds, I conjecture what might happen if I were to lose all fear. The comfort of this bourgeois prison often strikes me in the face. And rather than learning to be free, I put up with everything – simply to avoid being free.

THE LEADER'S DREAM

The leader is agitated in his sleep. His wife shakes him until he awakens from his nightmare. Startled, he gets up, drinks a little water, goes into the bathroom and looks at himself in the mirror. What does he see there? A middle-aged man. He smoothes the hair over his temples then goes back to bed. He dozes off and the same troubled dream returns. 'No, no!' he calls out in a hoarse voice, as he lies there tossing and turning.

The leader often has nightmares when he falls asleep. Are the

people threatening to rise against the leader? No, for the people elected him as their leader. Are the people threatening to oust their leader? No, because the leader looks after his people. He looks after them?

Yes, the people are a threat to their leader. The leader tosses and turns in his bed. At night he becomes frightened. Even if this is only a nightmare without any history. At night all he can see are rows of silent faces. And those faces are expressionless. His nightmare is always the same. Each night, he no sooner falls asleep than more silent faces appear as in a black and white photograph of a silent crowd. For whom is this silence? For the leader. A succession of identical faces which monotonously repeat the same face. A terrifying photomontage made up of expressionless faces which fill him with terror. A monstrous spectacle of impassive faces. And the sweat pours from the leader as he confronts those thousands of vacant, unblinking eyes. They had chosen him. And before they could get any closer, he called out: Yes, I lied to you!

WHAT IS WHAT?

When I receive a present given with affection by someone whom I do not like – how can one describe the feeling? Someone whom I no longer like and who no longer likes me – how can one express the pain and rancour? To be busy then come to a halt because suddenly overcome by blissful inertia – miraculous, smiling and foolish – how can one describe the feeling? All one can do is to ask: what is it called? To this day, I have only been able to name things by asking the question: What is its name? And this is its name.

PERILOUS NIGHT

I swear to you – the drawing-room was in darkness – but the music drew me to the centre of the room – something was on the alert there – the entire room darkened within darkness – I found myself in shadows – felt that, notwithstanding the darkness, the room was bright – I took refuge in fear – just as I once took refuge in you – and what did I find? simply that light was filling the room without making things any brighter – and that I was trembling amidst this difficult light – believe me, even though I cannot explain it – I am something perfect and fragile – as if I had never seen a flower – and it frightened me to think of that flower as the soul of someone who had just died – and I watched that bright centre which kept moving – and the flower disturbed me as though there were a dangerous bee hovering round it – a bee paralysed with terror before the ineffable beauty of that quivering flower – and then the flower became paralysed before the bee sweetened by the flower it sucked in darkness – believe me, even if I cannot understand – an inevitable ritual was being enacted – the room was filled by a penetrating smile as the shadows began to disperse – no evidence remained – I can offer no proof – I am my only proof – that is all I can tell you about this illness of mine which has landed me in hospital and which others do not understand – I do not know how anyone can be frightened by a rose – they experimented with violets

which are somewhat more delicate – but I was afraid – they smelled like flowers in a graveyard – and the flowers and bees are already calling me – I cannot resist their call – I truly desire to go. Do not mourn my death. I have decided what I must do here in hospital. My love, it will not be suicide. I value life much too dearly and therefore would never contemplate suicide. I am going, but in order to become fleeting light, to feel the taste of honey and, if so ordained, to become a bee.

UNWELCOME COMPASSION

Y with her great wisdom and understanding, trying hard not to be human, in the sense that to be human also means having faults and outbursts of temper. She tries hard to understand by forgiving others. That heart is bereft of me because it expects me to be admirable. Everyone turns to her when they have a problem she, 'the self-appointed comforter', understands, understands, understands. But my great pride dictates that I should be found on the street.

SINCE ONE HAS TO WRITE

Since one has to write, the least one can do is to avoid suppressing the words between the lines.

EARTHLY LOVE

An orange on the table. Blessed be the tree which gave you birth.

A HELPFUL WORD OF SELF-CRITICISM

It has to be helpful because, if it were harsh, it might dissuade me from ever writing again. I want to write again. Perhaps one of these days. Although I feel that, if I were to go back to writing, the style would be different from that in my previous books. In what sense different? That is of no interest.

I am critical of certain things I write, no matter whether good or bad, when they fail to reach that point where sorrow mingles with deep happiness and happiness turns out to be painful – for at that point comes the sting of life.

How often have I failed to achieve that frontal encounter with self which provokes cries of amazement. Sometimes that encounter with self can be achieved through a meeting between one human being and another.

No, I feel no shame in stating quite clearly that I want the maximum – and the maximum must be reached and conveyed with the mathematical precision of music heard and transposed into sheer ecstasy. Or not transposed, for it comes to the same thing. There must be, I am convinced there must be, some means whereby I can achieve this.

At times I feel that I shall achieve this simply by seeing things in my own way and taking it from there. Yet I once felt it could be achieved through compassion. Not through compassion transformed into a kindly disposition. But through a deep compassion transformed into action, if only the action of words. And just as 'God writes straight with crooked lines', a deep love akin to compassion can come from our mistakes.

TRUE AND FALSE SOLITUDE

Never having read much of Thomas Merton's work, I found myself copying out the following lines from *No Man is an Island*:

> When human society fulfils its true function, the persons who form it grow more and more in their individual freedom and personal integrity. And the more each individual develops and discovers the secret resources of his own incommunicable

personality, the more he can contribute to the life and the weal of the whole. Solitude is as necessary for society as silence is for language, and air for the lungs and food for the body.

A community that seeks to invade or destroy the spiritual solitude of the individuals who compose it, is condemning itself to death by spiritual asphyxiation.

And further on Merton states:

Solitude is so necessary both for society and for the individual that when society fails to provide sufficient solitude to develop the inner life of the persons who compose it, they rebel and seek false solitudes.

False solitude is a point of vantage from which an individual, who has been denied the right to become a person, takes revenge on society by turning his individuality into a destructive weapon. True solitude is found in humility, which is infinitely rich. False solitude is the refuge of pride, and it is infinitely poor. The poverty of false solitude comes from an illusion which pretends, by adorning itself in things it can never possess, to distinguish one individual self from the mass of other men. True solitude is selfless. Therefore, it is rich in silence and charity and peace. It finds in itself seemingly inexhaustible resources of good to bestow on other people. False solitude is self-centred. And because it finds nothing in its own centre, it seeks to draw all things into itself. But everything it touches becomes infected with its own nothingness, and falls apart. True solitude cleans the soul, lays it wide open to the four winds of generosity. False solitude locks the door against all men and pores over its own private accumulation of rubbish.

Both solitudes seek to distinguish the individual from the crowd. True solitude succeeds in this, false solitude fails. True solitude separates one man from the rest in order that he may freely develop the good that is his own, and then fulfil his true destiny by putting himself at the service of everyone else.

SHARING BREAD

It was Saturday and we had been forced into accepting an invitation to dinner. But each of us valued our Saturday evening far too much to waste it on a couple whom we found rather boring. Each of us had experienced happiness at some time or other and been left with the mark of desire. As for me, I desired everything. And there we were, trapped, as if our train had been derailed and we had been left stranded among strangers. No one there loved me and I had no love for them. As for my Saturday – which swayed outside my window amongst acacias and shadows – I preferred to fritter it away, to hold that lost Saturday in my clenched fist and crumple it like a handkerchief. Waiting for dinner to be served, we drank dispiritedly, toasting resentment. The next day would be Sunday. I have no desire to be with you, our dry expression was saying, as we slowly blew smoke from a dry cigarette. The meanness of not sharing our Saturday gradually began to erode and advance like rust to the point where any happiness would have been an affront to greater happiness.

Only the mistress of the household did not appear to prefer to spend her Saturday in better company. She, whose heart had nevertheless known other Saturdays. How could she have forgotten that one wants more and more? She did not so much as lose her patience with this mixed gathering of people, dreamy and resigned, who sat there in her house as if waiting for the first train to leave – any train – rather than remain in that empty station or curb that horse which was straining at the bit in its anxiety to gallop off and join other horses.

We finally moved into the dining-room for a supper without the blessing of hunger. The sight of that table took us by surprise. This could not be for us... It was a table for men of good will. Who were the missing guests for whom this was really intended? We ourselves. So that woman gave of her best without discrimination? She happily washed the feet of the first stranger to appear. Fidgeting awkwardly, we stood there staring.

The table was covered with solemn abundance. Sheaves of corn had been piled up on the white table-cloth. And there were

red apples, enormous yellow carrots, round tomatoes with skins ready to burst, juicy green courgettes, pineapples of a malign ferocity, tranquil, golden oranges, gherkins bristling like porcupines, cucumbers stretched tight over watery flesh, hollow red peppers that made our eyes smart – were all entangled in moist whiskers of maize, tinged with crimson like outlined lips. And bunches of grapes. The purplest of black grapes anxiously awaiting the moment to be crushed. Nor did they mind who should crush them – like the mistress of the household in times gone by. The tomatoes were not round for anyone: for the atmosphere, the circular atmosphere. Saturday was for anyone who might turn up. And the orange would sweeten the tongues of the first to arrive. Beside the plate of each unwanted guest, the woman who washed the feet of strangers had placed – without choosing or loving us – a sheaf of wheat, a bunch of fiery radishes or a red slice of water-melon with its glossy seeds. All broken up by the Spanish acidity of green lemons. In the earthenware jugs there was milk, as if it had been transported across a rocky desert with the goats. Wine that was almost black after all that pressing, shuddered in earthenware bowls. Everything was set before us. Everything cleansed of perverse human desire. Everything as it is and not as we would wish it to be. Simply existing and intact. Just as a field exists. Just as mountains exist. Just as men and women exist, but not us with our greed. Just as Saturday exists. Simply existing. It exists.

On behalf of nothing, it was time to eat. On behalf of no one, it was good. There was no dream. And along with the night, we gradually became anonymous, growing, rising above the height of possible existence. Then, like landed aristocracy, we accepted that table.

There was no holocaust: everything there was as anxious to be eaten as we were to eat it. Putting nothing aside for the following day, there and then I offered up my feelings to whatever had provoked them. This was a moment of existence for which I had not paid in advance with anxious waiting, the hunger that comes as we raise the food to our lips. For now we felt hungry, with an all-consuming hunger which took in everything, even the very crumbs. Those who were drinking wine kept a watchful eye on the milk. Those who were slowly sipping milk could taste the wine the others were drinking. And outside, the presence of God amongst the acacias. Acacias which existed. We ate. Like someone giving water to a horse. The carved meat was

passed round. Any exchanges were homely and down to earth. No one spoke ill of anyone because no one spoke well of anyone. It was a harvest reunion and any social niceties were dispensed with. We ate. Like a horde of locusts, we gradually covered the earth. As absorbed as those who cultivate existence, by planting and harvesting, by living and dying and eating. I ate with the honesty of someone who does not belie what he is eating. I ate that food and not its name. God was never possessed by what He is. Brusque, contented and austere, the food was saying: eat, eat and share among you. Everything there was mine. This was the father's table. I ate without affection, I ate without any feelings of compassion. And without giving way to hope. I ate without any trace of regret. And I was wholly deserving of that food. For I cannot always be my brother's keeper, nor can I be my own keeper. Alas, I no longer love myself. I have no desire to forge life because existence already exists. It exists like the ground we tread. Without a word of love. In total silence. But your satisfaction is akin to mine. We are strong and we eat. Bread is love between strangers.

SUPERNATURAL LIFE

After some reflection I came to the rather startling conclusion that thoughts are as supernatural as past history after death. I simply discovered to my surprise that thinking is unnatural. I then reflected a little more and discovered that I have no day-to-day existence. It is a life-to-life existence and life is supernatural.

WITHOUT HUMAN SIGNIFICANCE

How must things and people have been before we imposed some meaning with our human hope and vision? It must have been dreadful. If it rained, things got drenched on their own and dried out, only to burn up in the sun and shrivel into dust. How frightened I become unless I can impose some human meaning on the world. I am terrified of the rain whenever I separate it from the city and open umbrellas, or from fields soaking up water.

IMPATIENTLY WAITING

I am so attracted to this thing called death that I can only describe the way in which I cling to life out of solidarity with others as courageous. It would be deeply amoral not to wait as others wait for that hour to come. It would be too cunning by far on my part to advance in time, and unforgivable to be more astute than others. Hence my reason for waiting, despite my avid curiosity.

IN GEAR

Only my human soul prevents me from colliding disastrously with my physical organism, perfect machine that it is. Moreover, my human soul is the only means I have of accepting the soul

of the world at large without going mad. One must not be out of gear even for a second.

EXTRACT

I have now experienced that great fear of being alive and my only defence is none other than the vulnerability of life itself. I now realize that I must create my motif and theme from life itself. With delicate curiosity and mindful of my hunger and self-awareness, I have started – delicately alive – to chew pieces of bread.

LEARNING TO LIVE

One day I should dearly like to write an essay about guilt. How can one describe it, this thing which is irremissible and cannot be remedied? When I experience it I feel almost physically constrained: a sudden tightening in my chest below the neck: and there it remains: guilt. Guilt? Error. Sin. Then the world has no possible refuge. Wherever one goes, there is this heavy cross to bear, which one must not mention.

Were you to speak of it – no one would understand. Some will say – 'But surely everyone...' as some kind of consolation. Others will simply deny there has been any guilt. And those who do understand will lower their heads in shame. Ah, how I should like to be one of those who can go to church, accept penance and come away feeling unburdened. But I find it difficult to unburden myself. The guilt I feel is so vast and deeply rooted that I might as well learn to live with it, even if it takes away the taste of the tiniest morsel. Everything tastes of ashes even from a distance.

THE EGG AND THE CHICKEN (I)

In the morning the egg is lying on the kitchen table.

I see the egg at a single glance. I immediately perceive that I cannot be simply seeing an egg. Seeing an egg is always in the present: No sooner do I see the egg than I have seen an egg, the same egg which has existed for three thousand years. The very instant an egg is seen, it becomes the memory of an egg. The only person to see an egg is someone who has seen it before. Like a man who, in order to understand the present, must have had a past. Upon seeing the egg, it is already too late: an egg seen is an egg lost. A vision that passes like a sudden flash of lightning. To see the egg is the promise of being able to see the egg again one day. A brief glance which cannot be divided. Does thought intervene? No, there is no thought: there is only the egg. Vision is the essential faculty and,once used,I shall cast it aside. I shall remain without the egg. The egg has no *itself*. Individually, it does not exist.

It is impossible actually to see the egg. The egg is supravisible just as there are supersonic sounds the ear can no longer hear. No one is capable of seeing the egg. Can the dog see the egg? Only machines can see the egg. The windlass sees the egg. In ancient times an egg settled on my shoulder. Nor can anyone feel love for the egg. My love for the egg is suprasensitive and I have no way of knowing that I feel this love. One is unaware of loving the egg. In ancient times I was the depository of the egg and I walked on tiptoe in order not to disturb the egg's silence. When I died, they carefully removed the egg inside me: it was still alive. Just as we ignore the world because it is obvious, so we fail to see the egg because it, too, is so obvious. Does the egg no longer exist? It exists at this moment. Egg, you are perfect. You are white. To you I dedicate this beginning. To you I dedicate this first moment.

To the egg, I dedicate the Chinese nation.

The egg is something in suspense. It has never settled. When it comes to rest, it is not the egg that has come to rest. A surface has formed beneath the egg. I vaguely glance at the egg in the kitchen in order not to break it. I take the greatest care not to

understand it. It cannot be understood and I know that if I were to understand the egg, it could only be in error. To understand is proof of error. Never to think about the egg is one way of having seen it. Could it be that I know about the egg? Of course I know about it. Like this: I exist, therefore I know. What I do not know about the egg is what really matters. What I do not know about the egg gives me the egg itself. The Moon is inhabited by eggs...

The egg is an exteriorization: to have a shell is an act of giving. The egg exposes the kitchen. It transforms the table into a slanting plane. The egg exposes everything. Anyone who fathoms the egg, who can penetrate the egg's surface, is seeking something else: that person is suffering from hunger.

The egg is the chicken's soul. The awkward chicken. The stable egg. The startled chicken. The placid egg. Like a missile suspended in mid-air. For the egg is an egg in space. An egg against a blue background. Egg, I love you. I love you like something that does not even know it loves another thing. I do not touch it. It is the aura of my fingers that sees the egg. I do not touch it. But to devote myself to the vision of the egg would be to renounce my earthly existence which I continue to need, both yolk and white. Can the egg see me? Is it trying to fathom me? No, the egg only sees me. And it is immune to that painful understanding. The egg has never struggled to be an egg. The egg is a gift. It is invisible to the naked eye. From egg to egg, one reaches God Who is invisible to the naked eye. Perhaps the egg was once a triangle which turned so much in space that it ended up being oval. Is the egg basically a sealed jar? Perhaps the first jar to be modelled by the Etruscans? No. The egg originated from Macedonia. There it was designed, the fruit of the most deliberate spontaneity. On the sands of Macedonia a mathematician traced it out with a rod in one hand. And then erased it with his bare foot.

An egg needs careful handling. That is why the chicken is the egg's disguise. The chicken exists so that the egg may traverse the ages. This is what a mother is for. The egg lives like a fugitive because it is always ahead of its time: it is more than contemporary: it belongs to the future. Meanwhile the egg will always be revolutionary. It lives inside the chicken so that no one may call it white. The egg is really white but must not be called white. Not because this would harm the egg which is immune from danger, but those people who state the obvious by describing

the egg as white renege on life. To call something white which is white can destroy humanity. Truth is always in danger of destroying humanity. A man was once accused of being what he was and referred to as That Man. They were not lying: he was man. But we have not recovered since. This is the universal law so that we may go on living. One may say 'a pretty face' but anyone who says 'face' will die for having exhausted the subject.

In time the egg became the egg of a chicken. It is not. But once adopted, the surname is used. One should say 'the egg of the chicken'. If people simply say 'egg', the topic is exhausted and the world goes back to being naked. An egg is the most naked thing in existence. Regarding the egg, there is always the danger that we may discover what could be termed beauty, in other words, its utter veracity. The egg's veracity has no semblance of truth. If its beauty were to be discovered, people might try to make it rectangular. The egg is in no danger, it would not become rectangular. (Our guarantee is that it cannot: and that is the egg's great strength: its supremacy stems from the greatness of being incapable, which spreads like reluctance.) But as I was saying, the egg would not become rectangular and anyone struggling to make it rectangular would be in danger of losing his own life. And so the egg puts us at risk. Our advantage is that the egg is invisible to the vast majority of people. And as for the initiated, the initiated conceal the egg as in a freemasonry.

As for the chicken's body, the chicken's body is the clearest attempt to prove that the egg does not exist. Because one look at the chicken is enough to see that the egg could not possibly exist.

And what about the chicken?

The egg is the chicken's great sacrifice. The egg is the cross the chicken bears in life. The egg is the chicken's unattainable dream. The chicken loves the egg. She does not know that the egg truly exists. Were she to know she has an egg inside her, would she be saved? Were she to know she has an egg inside her, would she lose her function as a chicken? To be a chicken is the chicken's only chance of surviving mentally. Survival means salvation. For it would appear that the act of living does not exist. Living ends in death. While the chicken goes on surviving. And to survive is to keep up the struggle against mortal existence. This is what it means to be a chicken. The chicken always looks ill at ease.

The chicken must not know she is carrying an egg. Otherwise

she might be saved as a chicken – although there is no guarantee – but at the same time she would lose her egg in a premature birth to rid herself of that exalted ideal. Therefore she does not know. The chicken only exists on behalf of the egg. She had a mission to fulfil which she enjoyed. And this was the chicken's undoing. Enjoyment has nothing to do with birth. To enjoy being alive is painful.

As for what came first, it was the egg that discovered the chicken would make the perfect disguise. The chicken was not even summoned. The chicken is directly chosen. She exists as in dreams. She has no sense of reality. She gets nervous because people are always interrupting her daydreams. The chicken is one great slumber. She suffers from some strange malaise. Her strange malaise is the egg. She cannot explain: 'I know the fault lies with me'. She calls her life a mistake. 'I no longer know what I feel', etc.

What clucks all day long inside the chicken is etc. etc. etc. The chicken has considerable resources of inner life. If truth be told, inner life is all she possesses. Our vision of her inner life is what we refer to as *chicken*. The chicken's inner life consists of behaving as if she understood. The slightest threat of danger and she screeches her head off. All this simply to ensure that the egg does not break inside her. The egg which breaks inside the chicken has the appearance of blood.

The chicken watches the horizon.

THE EGG AND THE CHICKEN (II)

The chicken watches the horizon. As if she were watching an egg slowly advance from the distant horizon. Apart from being a means of transport for the egg, the chicken is stupid, idle and short-sighted. How can the chicken understand herself when she is everything the egg is not? The egg is still that same egg which originated in Macedonia. But the chicken is always a recent tragedy. She is continuously being designed anew. Yet no more apt form has been found for the chicken. As my neighbour answers the telephone, he absentmindedly sketches a chicken with his pencil. But nothing can be done for the chicken: it is in her nature to be of no use to herself. And since her destiny is more important than the chicken herself and her destiny is the egg, her private life is of no interest to us.

The chicken neither recognizes the egg when it is still inside her nor when it has been laid. When the chicken sees the egg, she thinks she is confronting the impossible. And suddenly I see the egg in the kitchen and all I see there is food. I do not recognize it. My heart is beating fast. Something is changing inside me. I can no longer see the egg clearly. Apart from each individual egg, apart from the egg one eats, the egg no longer exists for me. I can no longer bring myself to believe in an egg. I find it more and more difficult to believe, I am weak and dying. Farewell. I have been looking at an egg for so long that it has hypnotized me and sent me to sleep.

The chicken had no desire to sacrifice her life. She who had chosen to be 'happy'. She who had failed to perceive that if she were to spend her life designing the egg inside herself like an illuminated manuscript, she would be doing all that could be expected of her. She remained true to herself. She who thought her feathers were to cover her precious skin, unaware that those feathers were only intended to lighten her burden while she carried the egg, because the chicken's deep suffering might put the egg at risk. She who thought satisfaction was a gift rather than a ploy to keep her totally distracted until the egg had been formed. She who did not know that '*I*' is only one of the words people jot down on paper when answering the telephone, a mere

attempt to find some more convenient form. She who thought that *I* means to possess a *selfness*. The chickens in greatest danger of harming the egg are those who pursue a relentless *I*. Their *I* is so persistent that they cannot pronounce the word egg. But who knows, perhaps this is precisely what the egg needs. Because if they were not so distracted and were to pay closer attention to the great life forming inside them, they might disturb the egg.

I began discussing the chicken, yet for some time now I have said nothing about the chicken. I am still talking about the egg. Only to realize that I do not understand the egg. All I understand is a broken egg: broken in the frying pan. And this is how I indirectly pledge myself to the egg's existence. My sacrifice is to reduce myself to my inner self. I have concealed my destiny with my joys and sorrows. Like those in the convent who sweep floors and wash linen, serving without the glory of any higher office, my task is to live my joys and sorrows. It is essential that I should possess the modesty of living. In the kitchen I take one more egg and break its shell and form. And from this very moment the egg no longer exists. It is most important that I should be kept occupied and distracted. I am essentially one of those who renege. I belong to the freemasonry of those who, once having seen the egg, reject it as a form of protection. Anxious to avoid destruction, we destroy ourselves. Agents in disguise and assigned to discreet enquiries, we occasionally recognize each other. A certain manner of looking, a certain way of shaking hands, help us to recognize each other, and we call this love. Then there is no further need for disguise. Though one does not speak, one does not hear either; though one may be telling the truth, there is no further need for pretence. Love prospers, especially between a man and woman, when one is allowed to share a little more. Few people desire true love because love shakes our confidence in everything else. And few can bear to lose all their other illusions. There are some who opt for love in the belief that love will enrich their personal lives. On the contrary: love is poverty, in the end. Love is to possess nothing. Love is also the deception of what one believed to be love. And it is not a prize likely to make one conceited. Love is not a prize. It is a state conceded only to those who would otherwise contaminate the egg with their private sorrow. This does not make an honourable exception of love. It is conceded precisely to those unworthy agents who would spoil everything unless they were allowed some vague intuition.

All the agents enjoy many advantages in order to ensure the egg is formed. There is no cause for envy, because even the worst of the conditions imposed on some agents happen to be the ideal conditions for the egg. As for the satisfaction of the agents, they receive that, too, without conceit. They quietly savour any satisfaction. This is the sacrifice we make so that the egg may be formed. We have been endowed with a nature which has a considerable capacity for satisfaction, which helps to make satisfaction less painful. There are instances of agents who commit suicide: they discover that the handful of instructions at their disposal are insufficient and sense a lack of support. There was the case of the agent who publicly revealed his identity because he could not bear not to be understood, just as he found it intolerable not to be respected by others. He died after being run over as he was leaving a restaurant. There was another agent who did not even need to be eliminated: he slowly burned himself up in disgust, a disgust which overwhelmed him when he discovered that the few instructions he had been given explained nothing. Another agent was also eliminated because he thought 'the truth should be spoken courageously', and he set about searching for that truth. People say he died in the name of truth, but in fact he simply obscured truth, he was so ingenuous. His seeming courage was mere folly and his desire for loyalty was naïve. He had failed to understand that loyalty is not something pure, that to be loyal is to be disloyal to all the rest. These extreme cases of death are not provoked by cruelty. There is a job to be done which one might term cosmic, and unfortunately individual cases cannot be taken into consideration. For those who succumb and become individuals, there are instructions, there is charity, there is an understanding which does not discriminate between motives – our human life, in short.

THE EGG AND THE CHICKEN (III)

The eggs sizzle in the frying pan and, lost in a dream, I prepare breakfast. Without any sense of reality, I call the children who jump out of bed, draw up their chairs and start eating and the work of the day which has just dawned begins, with shouting and laughter and food, the white and the yolk, happiness amidst squabbles, the day is our salt and we are the salt of the day, life is quite tolerable, life occupies and distracts, life provokes laughter.

It makes me smile in my mystery. The mystery of my being which is simply a means, and not an end, has given me the most dangerous freedom of all. I am not stupid and I use it to my advantage. I even do considerable harm to others. I take advantage of the phoney job they have given me to conceal my identity and turn it into my real occupation. I have even misused the money they pay me on a daily basis to make life easier while the egg is being formed. Having changed the money on the black market, I have misused it and only recently bought shares in a brewery which has made me a rich woman. I still refer to all this as the essential modesty of living. They have also allowed me time so that the egg may form inside me at its leisure but I have frittered away my time in illicit pleasures and sorrows, completely forgetting about the egg. That is my simplicity as a human agent.

Or is this precisely what they wanted to happen so that the egg may be formed? Is this freedom a coercion? For I am now beginning to see that every error on my part has been exploited. My grievance is that in their eyes I count for nothing, I am simply useful. With the money they pay me I have started drinking.

No one knows how you feel inside when you are hired to pretend you are a traitor and you end up believing in your own betrayal. A job which consists of forgetting day after day. Being expected to feign dishonour. My mirror no longer reflects a face which can even be called my own. Either I am an agent or this is truly betrayal. But I sleep the sleep of the just in the knowledge that my futile existence does not impede the march of infinite time. On the contrary: it would appear that I am expected to be utterly futile, that I should even sleep the sleep of the just. They

want me occupied and distracted, by whatever means. For with my wandering thoughts and solemn foolishness I might impede what is happening inside me. Strictly speaking, I myself have only served to impede. The notion that my destiny exceeds me suggests that I might be an agent. At least, they might have allowed me to perceive as much, for I am one of those people who do a job badly unless I am allowed some insight. They made me forget what I had been allowed to perceive, but I still have this vague notion that my destiny exceeds me and that I am the instrument of their work.

In any case, I could only be the instrument because the work could never be mine. I have already tried to establish myself in my own right without success; my hand has never stopped trembling to this day. Had I insisted a little more, I should have lost my health for good. Since then, after that abortive experience, I have tried to reason as follows: I have already received a great deal and they have made me every possible concession. And the agents, far better than me, have also worked only for what they did not know. And with the same meagre instructions and, like me, they were modest civil servants or otherwise. I have already received a great deal. Sometimes overcome with emotion at being so privileged yet without showing any gratitude! My heart beating with emotion, yet without understanding anything! My heart beating confidently, yet leaving me baffled.

But what about the egg? This is precisely one of their little ruses. As I was talking about the egg, I forgot about the egg. 'Keep on talking, keep on talking,' they told me. And the egg remains completely protected by all those words. 'Keep on talking' is one of their guiding rules. I feel so weary.

Out of devotion to the egg I forgot about it. Forgetfulness born out of necessity. Forgetfulness born out of self-interest. For the egg is an evasion. Confronted by my possessive veneration, the egg could withdraw never to return and I should die of sorrow. But suppose the egg were to be forgotten and I were to make the sacrifice of getting on with my life and forgetting about it. Suppose the egg proved to be impossible. Then perhaps – free, delicate, without any message whatsoever for me – the egg would move through space once more and come up to the window I have always left open. And perhaps with the first light of day the egg might descend into our apartment and move serenely into the kitchen. As I illuminate it with my pallor.

FIVE STORIES ON A SINGLE THEME

This story could be called *The Statues*. Another possible title would be *Murder*. Or even *How to get rid of Cockroaches*. So I shall tell at least three stories and all of them true, because none of the three will contradict the others. Although they constitute one story, they could become a thousand and one, were I to be granted a thousand and one nights.

The first story, *How to get rid of Cockroaches*, begins like this: I was complaining about the cockroaches. A woman heard me complain. She gave me a remedy for killing them off. I was to mix together equal quantities of sugar, flour and plaster of Paris. The flour and sugar would attract the cockroaches, the plaster of Paris would dry up their insides. I followed her advice. The cockroaches died almost immediately.

The next story is really the first, and is called *Murder*. It begins like this: I was complaining about the cockroaches. A woman heard me complain. The remedy is prepared. And then murder ensues. The truth is that I had only complained in abstract terms about the cockroaches for they were not even mine: they came from the ground floor and climbed into our apartment through the pipes in the building. It was only when I prepared the mixture that they became mine, too. On our behalf, therefore, I began to measure and weigh the ingredients with somewhat greater concentration. I was gripped by a vague sense of rancour, by a sense of outrage. During the day the cockroaches were invisible and no one would have believed in the hidden evil that was invading our tranquil household. But if the cockroaches, like some dark secret, slept by day, there I was preparing their nightly poison. Meticulous and eager, I prepared the elixir of prolonged death. A nervous fear and my own guilty secret guided me. Now I chillingly desired only one thing: to kill every cockroach in existence. Cockroaches crawl up the pipes while weary humans dream. And now the mixture was ready, white as white could be. As if I were dealing with cockroaches as wily as myself, I cautiously spread the powder which seemed to have become part of my nature. Lying there in bed in the silence of night, I could imagine those cockroaches climbing up one by one into

the kitchen where darkness slumbered, a solitary towel watching from the clothes-line. I awoke hours later, startled at having overslept. Dawn had broken. On a nearby hill a cockerel crowed.

This third story I am now about to tell is entitled *The Statues*. It opens with my complaint about the cockroaches. Then the same woman turns up. And so it goes on until I wake up at first light feeling drowsy and make my way to the kitchen. The pantry floor looks even more drowsy with its tiled perspective. And in the shadows of dawn, there is a purplish hue which distances everything. Looking down, I see blobs of white and shadows at my feet: a multitude of rigid statues scattered everywhere. Cockroaches which had petrified from the core outwards. Some are lying upside down. Others arrested in the midst of some movement which they will never complete. In the mouths of some of the cockroaches there are still traces of white powder. I am the first person to see dawn breaking over Pompeii. I know what this night has been. I am aware of the orgy enacted in the dark. The plaster of Paris must have hardened gradually in many of them as in some vital process, and the cockroaches, with increasingly painful movements, must have eagerly intensified the night's frenzied pleasures as they tried to escape from their insides. Until they finally turned to stone with innocent terror and an expression, but such an expression, of sorrowful reproach. Others, suddenly assailed by their own core, unaware that their insides were turning to stone, suddenly crystallized like the truncated phrase: I love... Invoking the name of love in vain, the cockroaches sang on a summer's night. While that cockroach over there, the one with its brown antennae powdered white, must have realized much too late that it had become mummified simply because it had not known how to use things with the spontaneous grace of the *in vain*: 'Alas, I looked too closely inside myself! Alas, I looked too closely inside...' From my impassive height as a human being, I witness a world's destruction. Dawn breaks. Here and there, the stiff antennae of dead cockroaches quiver in the breeze. The cockerel from the previous story begins to crow.

The fourth story marks a new era in the house. The story begins in the usual fashion: I was complaining about the cockroaches. It continues up to the moment when I discover those statues made of plaster of Paris. Dead, of course. I glance at the pipes where this very night another swarm will appear, advancing slowly upwards in Indian file. Should I administer the lethal

sugar night after night? Like someone who can no longer sleep without satisfying this craving for the nightly ritual. And should I spend my sleepless nights on the terrace? Eager to discover those statues my humid nights have erected? I trembled with perverse satisfaction at the vision of my dual existence as a sorceress. I also trembled at the sight of that hardening plaster of Paris, the depravity of existence which would shatter my inner form.

The cruel moment of choosing between two paths which I thought would divide, convinced that any choice would mean sacrificing either myself or my soul. I made my choice. And today I secretly wear the badge of virtue on my heart. 'This apartment has been disinfected.'

The fifth story is called *Leibnitz and the Transcendence of Love in Polynesia*. It begins as follows: I was complaining about the cockroaches.

THE PRINCESS (I)

If I were to be asked about Ofélia and her parents, I should reply with decorous honesty: I scarcely knew them. Before the same jury I should testify: I scarcely know myself – and to each member of the jury I should say, with the same innocent look of someone who has hypnotized herself into obedience: I scarcely know you. But sometimes I wake from a long sleep and turn submissively towards the delicate abyss of disorder.

I am trying to speak about that family which disappeared years ago without leaving any traces in me, and of which all that remains is a faded and distant image. My sudden willingness to know was provoked today when a little chick appeared in the house. It was brought by a hand which wanted to have the pleasure of giving me some living thing. Upon releasing the chick from its box, its charm overwhelmed us. Tomorrow is Christmas Day, but the moment of silence I await all year came on the eve of Christ's birth. Something chirping by itself arouses the most gentle curiosity which, beside a manger, becomes adoration. Well, whatever next, said my husband. He felt much too big and clumsy. Scruffy and with gaping mouths, the children approached. Feeling somewhat courageous, I gave in to feelings of happiness. As for the chick, it went on chirping. But tomorrow is Christmas, the older boy said self-consciously. We smiled, disarmed and curious.

But sentiments are like sudden water. Presently – just as water changes and loses some of its force when it attempts to devour a stone, and changes once more when we bathe our feet – presently there is no longer simply an aura and glow on our faces. Feeling good and anxious, we gathered round the distressed chick. Soft-heartedness leaves my husband cold and morose, something to which we have become accustomed; he tends to torment himself. For the children, who are much more serious, kindness is a passion. As for me, kindness inhibits me. Very soon the same water had changed, and we watched, ill at ease, entangled in our clumsiness as we struggled to be good. And now the water had changed, the expression on our faces gradually betrayed the burden of our desire, our hearts weighed down

by a love which was no longer free. The chick's fear of us also made us feel uncomfortable; there we were, and not one of us worthy of appearing before a chick; with every chirp it was driving us away. With each chirp, it was reducing us to helplessness. Its persistent terror accused us of thoughtless mirth which by now was no longer mirth, but annoyance. The chick's moment had passed, and with increasing urgency it was expelling us without letting go. We adults quickly suppressed our feelings. But the children were silently indignant. They accused us of doing nothing for the chick or for humanity. The chick's persistent chirping had already left us, the parents, uncomfortably resigned: such is life. Only we had never said so to the children, for we were ashamed; and we postponed indefinitely the moment when we should summon them and tell them straight that this is how things are. It became increasingly difficult, the silence grew, and they were slow to respond to our anxiety to give them love in return. If we had never discussed such things before, all the more reason why we should hide from them now the smile that came to our faces as we listened to the desperate squawks coming from that beak; a smile as if it were up to us to bless the fact that this is the way things are, and we had just given them our blessing.

As for the chick, it was chirping. Standing on the polished table, it dared not make a move as it chirped to itself. I never realized there could be so much terror inside a creature made only of feathers. Feathers covering what? Half a dozen fragile little bones put together for what purpose? To chirp terror. Mindful of our inability to understand each other and out of respect for the children's revolt against us, we watched impatiently in silence. It was impossible to comfort the chick with words of reassurance, to console that tiny creature which was terrified just to have been born. How could we promise that everything would be all right? A father and a mother, we knew just how brief the chick's life would be. The chick also knew, in the way that living creatures come to know; through profound fear.

Meanwhile, there was the chick with all its charm, an ephemeral, yellow thing. I also wanted the chick to experience the joys of life, just as we were expected to experience them, for its only joy was to make others happy. That the chick should feel it was superfluous, unwanted – one of the chicks is bound to be useless – and had only been born for the greater glory of God and, therefore, for the happiness of mankind. But in loving our dear little

chick, did we wish it to be happy simply because we loved it? I also knew that only a mother determines birth, and ours was the love of those who take pleasure in loving; I rejoiced in the grace of having devoted myself to loving; bells, bells were pealing because I know how to adore. But the chick was trembling, a thing of terror rather than beauty.

The younger boy could stand it no longer:

– Do you want to be its mummy?

Startled, I answered yes. I was the messenger assigned to that creature which did not understand the only language I knew: I was loving without being loved. My mission might founder and the eyes of four children waited with the intransigence of hope for my first real sign of love. I recoiled a little, smiling and aloof; I looked at my family and wanted them to smile. A man and four little boys were staring at me, incredulous and trusting. I was the mistress of that household, the provider. I could not understand the impassiveness of these five males. How often I would founder, so that, in my hour of fear, they would look at me. I tried to isolate myself from the challenge of those five males, so that I, too, might expect love from myself and remember what love is like. I opened my mouth, I was about to tell them the truth: exactly how, I cannot say.

But what if a woman were to appear to me in the night holding a child in her arms. And what if she were to say: Take care of my child. I would reply: How can I? She would repeat: Take care of my child. I would reply: I cannot. She would insist: Take care of my child. Then – then, because I do not know how to do anything and because I cannot remember anything and because it is night – I would then stretch out my hand and save a child. Because it is night, because I am alone in another's night, because this silence is much too great for me, because I have two hands in order to sacrifice the better of the two, and because I have no choice.

THE PRINCESS (II)

It was at that moment that I saw Ofélia again in my mind's eye. And at that same moment I recalled that I had been the witness of a little girl.

Later, I remembered how my neighbour, Ofélia's mother, had the dark complexion of an Indian woman. The dark shadows round her eyes made them very beautiful and gave her the sort of languorous appearance which caused men to take a second look. One day, when we were seated on a bench in the park, while the children were playing, she told me with that resolute expression of someone scanning the desert: 'I have always wanted to take a course in confectionery.' I remembered that her husband – who was also dark-skinned, as if they had chosen each other for their complexion – wanted to make a fortune in his particular line of business: he was the manager or perhaps even the owner of an hotel, I was never quite sure. This gave him an air of refinement but distinctly cool. When we could not avoid meeting in the lift, he tolerated an exchange of words with that haughty tone of voice which he had acquired in greater battles. By the time we reached the tenth floor, the humility his cold manner had forced from me placated him a little: perhaps he might even arrive home a little more amiable. As for Ofélia's mother, because we lived on the same floor she feared we might become too intimate, and started avoiding me, unaware that I was also on my guard. The only intimacy between us had been that day on that bench in the park, where, with those dark shadows round her eyes and those thin lips, she had talked about learning how to decorate cakes. I did not know what to say and ended up by confiding, so that she might know that I liked her, that I, too, would like to take a course in confectionery. That one moment of mutual intimacy divided us even more, out of fear that any mutual understanding might be abused. Ofélia's mother was even rude to me in the lift: the next day I was holding one of my children by the hand, the lift was going down slowly and, feeling oppressed by the silence which gave the other woman strength – I said in an affable tone of voice, which I myself found repugnant even as I spoke:

– We're going to visit his grandmother.

Whereupon to my horror, she snapped in reply:

– No one asked you where you're going. I never poke my nose into other people's affairs.

– Well I never, I mumbled in a low voice.

This led me to believe there and then that I was being made to pay for that moment of intimacy on the park bench. This in turn made me think that she was afraid of having confided more than she actually had that day. And in turn made me wonder if she had not told me more, in fact, than either of us had realized. By the time the lift finally reached the ground floor, I had reconstituted that obstinate, languid air of hers on the park bench – and I gazed with new eyes at the proud beauty of Ofélia's mother. 'I won't tell a soul that you want to learn how to decorate cakes', I thought to myself, giving her a furtive glance.

The father hostile, the mother keeping her distance. A proud family. They treated me as if I were already living in their future hotel and as if I had offended them by not paying my bill. Above all, they treated me as if I did not believe, nor could they prove, who they were. And who were they? I sometimes asked myself that question. Why was that slap imprinted on their faces and why was that dynasty living in exile? Nor could they forgive me for carrying on as if I had been forgiven. If I met them on the street, outside the zone to which I had been confined, it terrified me to be caught out of bounds: I would draw back to let them pass, I gave way as the dusky, well-dressed trio passed as if on their way to Holy Mass – a family that lived under the sign of some proud destiny or hidden martyrdom – purple as the flowers of the Passion. Theirs was an ancient dynasty.

But contact was made through the daughter. She was a most beautiful child with her long hair in plaits. Ofélia with the same dark shadows round her eyes as her mother, the same gums looking a little inflamed, the same thin lips as if someone had inflicted a wound. But how those lips could talk. She started coming to visit me. The door-bell would ring, I would open the spy-hole without seeing anyone, and then I would hear a resolute voice:

– It's me, Ofélia Maria dos Santos Aguiar.

Disheartened, I would open the door. Ofélia would enter. She had come to visit me, for my two little boys were far too small then to be treated to her phlegmatic wisdom. I was a grown-up and busy, but it was me she had to visit. She would arrive dis-

pensing with any formalities, as if there were a time and place for everything. She would carefully lift her flounced skirt, sit down and arrange the flowers – and only then would she look at me. In the midst of duplicating my files, I carried on working and listening. Ofélia would then proceed to give me advice. She had very decided opinions about everything. Everything I did was not quite right in her opinion. She would say 'in my opinion' in a resentful tone, as if I should have asked her advice and, since I had not asked, she was giving it. With her eight proud and well-lived years, she told me that, in her opinion, I did not rear my children properly: for when you give children an inch, they take a mile. Bananas should not be served with milk. It can kill you. But of course, you must do what you think is best: everyone knows their own mind. It was rather late for me to be wearing a dressing-gown: her mother dressed as soon as she got up, but everyone must live as they see fit. If I tried to explain that I still had to take my bath, Ofélia would remain silent and watch me closely. With a hint of tenderness and then patience, she added that it was rather late to be taking a bath. I was never allowed the last word. What last word could I possibly offer when she informed me: vegetable patties should not be covered. One afternoon in the baker's shop, I found myself unexpectedly confronting the useless truth: there stood a whole row of uncovered vegetable patties. 'But I told you so', I could hear her say, as if she were standing there beside me. With her plaits and flounces, with her unyielding delicacy. She would descend like a visitation into my sitting-room, which was still waiting to be tidied up. Fortunately she also talked a lot of nonsense, which made me smile, however low I might be feeling.

The worst part of this visitation was the silence. I would raise my eyes from the typewriter and wonder how long Ofélia had been watching me in silence. What could possibly attract this child to me? Personally, I found myself exasperating. On one occasion, after another of her lengthy silences, she calmly said to me: you are a strange woman. And as if I had been struck on the face without any form of protection – right on the face which is our inner self and therefore extremely sensitive – struck full on the face, I thought to myself in a rage: you are about to see just how strange I can be. She who was so well protected, whose mother was protected, whose father was protected.

THE PRINCESS (III)

However, I still preferred her advice and criticism. Much less tolerable was her habit of using the word *therefore* as a way of linking sentences into a never-ending chain. She told me that I bought far too many vegetables at the market – therefore – they would not fit into my small fridge and – therefore – they would go bad before the next market day. A few days later I looked at the vegetables, and they had gone bad. Therefore – she was right. On another occasion, she saw fewer vegetables lying on the kitchen table, as I had secretly taken her advice. Ofélia looked and looked. She seemed prepared to say nothing. I waited, standing there fuming but saying nothing. Ofélia said phlegmatically:

– It won't be long before there's another market day.

The vegetables had run out towards the middle of the week. How did she know? I asked myself bewildered. Probably she would reply with 'therefore'. Why did I never, never know? Why did she know everything, why was the earth so familiar to her, and here was I without protection? Therefore? Therefore.

On one occasion, Ofélia actually made a mistake. Geography – she said, sitting before me with her hands clasped on her lap – is a kind of study. It was not exactly a mistake, it was a slight miscalculation – but for me it had the grace of defeat, and before the moment could pass, I said to her mentally: that's exactly how it's done! just go on like that and one day it will be easier or more difficult for you, but that's the way, just go on making mistakes, ever so slowly.

One morning, in the midst of her conversation, she announced peremptorily: 'I'm going home to get something but I'll be right back.' I dared to suggest: 'If you've got something to do, there's no need to hurry back.' Ofélia looked at me, silent and questioning. 'There is a very nasty little girl', I thought firmly to myself so that she might see the entire sentence written on my face. She kept on looking at me. A look wherein – to my surprise and dismay – I saw loyalty, patient confidence in me, and the silence of someone who never spoke. When had I ever thrown her a bone – that she should follow me in silence for the rest of my life? I averted my eyes. She gave a tranquil sigh. 'I'll be right

back.' What does she want? – I became nervous – why do I attract people who do not even like me?

Once when Ofélia was sitting there, the door-bell rang. I opened the door and came face to face with Ofélia's mother. Protective and unbending, she had come in search of her daughter.

– Is Ofélia Maria here by any chance?

– Yes, she is, I said, excusing myself as if I had abducted her.

– Don't do that again – she said to Ofélia with a tone of voice that was meant for me: then turning to me, she suddenly sounded peevish: I'm sorry if you've been troubled.

– Not at all, your little girl is so clever.

The mother looked at me in mild surprise – but suspicion flickered across her eyes. And in her expression I could read: what do you want from her?

– I have already forbidden Ofélia to come bothering you, she now said with open distrust. And firmly grabbing the little girl by the hand to lead her away, she appeared to be protecting her from me. Feeling positively degenerate, I watched them through the half-opened spy-hole without making a sound: the two of them walked down the corridor leading to their apartment, the mother sheltering her child with murmured words of loving reproach, the daughter impassive with her swaying plaits and flounces. On closing the spy-hole, I realized that I was still in my dressing-gown and that I had been seen like this by the mother who dressed the moment she got up. I thought somewhat defiantly: Well, now that her mother despises me, at least there will be no more visits from the daughter.

But naturally, she came back. I was much too attractive for that child. I had enough defects to warrant her advice, I was apt terrain for exercising her severity, I had already become the property of that slave of mine: of course, she came back, lifted her flounces and sat down.

As it happened, Easter was approaching, the market was full of chicks and I had brought one home for the children. We amused ourselves with it, then the chick was put in the kitchen while the children went out to play. Soon afterwards, Ofélia appeared for her daily visit. I was typing and from time to time I would express assent, my thoughts elsewhere. The girl's monotonous voice, the singsong of someone reciting from memory, made me feel quite dizzy, her voice infiltrating between the words typed on the paper, as she talked and talked.

Then it struck me that everything seemed to have come to a sudden standstill. Aware that I was no longer being tortured, I looked at her hazily. Ofélia Maria's head was erect, her plaits transfixed.

– What's that? she asked.

– What's what?

– That! she said stubbornly.

– What?

We might have remained there forever in a vicious circle of 'that!' and 'what?', were it not for the extraordinary will-power of this child, who, without saying a word, but with an expression of intransigent authority, obliged me to hear what she herself was hearing. Forced into attentive silence, I finally heard the faint chirping of the chick in the kitchen.

– It's the chick.

– The chick? she said, most suspiciously.

– I bought a chick, I replied submissively.

– A chick! she repeated, as if I had insulted her.

– A chick.

THE PRINCESS (IV)

And there the matter would have rested had I not seen something which I had never noticed before.

What was it? Whatever it was, it was no longer there. A chick had flickered momentarily in her eyes only to disappear, as if it had never existed. And a shadow had formed. A dark shadow covering the earth. From the moment her trembling lips almost involuntarily mouthed the words: 'I want one, too' – from that moment, darkness intensified in the depths of her eyes into remorseful desire which, if touched, would close up like the leaf of the opium poppy. She retreated before the impossible, the impossible which had drawn near, and which, in a moment of temptation, had almost become hers; the darkness of her eyes changed colour like gold. Slyness crept into her face – and had I not been there, she would slyly have stolen something. In those eyes, which blinked with cunning knowledge, in those eyes there was a marked tendency to steal. She gave me a sudden look betraying her envy: you have everything; and censure: why are we not the same, then I would have a chick? and possessiveness – she wanted me for herself. Slowly I slumped into my chair, her envy was exposing my poverty and left my poverty musing: had I not been there, she would have stolen my poverty as well. She wanted everything. After the tremor of possessiveness subsided, the darkness of her eyes revealed her suffering. I was not only exposing her to a face without protection. I was now exposing her to the best of the world: to a chick. Without seeing me, her moist eyes stared at me with an intense abstraction, which made intimate contact with my intimacy. Something was happening which I could not understand at a glance. And desire returned once more. This time her eyes were full of anguish, as if they had nothing to do with the rest of her body, which had become detached and independent. And those eyes grew wider, alarmed at the physical strain as her inner being began to disintegrate. Her delicate mouth was that of a child, a bruised purple. She looked up at the ceiling – the dark shadows round her eyes gave her an air of sublime martyrdom. Without stirring, I watched her. I knew about the high incidence of infant

mortality. The great question she was asking concerned me as well. Is it worthwhile? I do not know, my increasing composure replied, but it is so. There, before my silence, she surrendered to the process, and if she was asking me the great question, it must remain unanswered. She had to surrender – and without anything in return. It had to be so. And without anything in return. She held back, reluctant to surrender. But I waited. I knew that we are that thing which must happen. I could only be her silence. And, bewildered and confused, I could hear her heart, which was not mine, beating inside me. Before my fascinated eyes, like some mysterious emanation, she was being transformed into a child.

Not without sorrow. In silence, I watched the sorrow of her awkward happiness. The lingering colic of a snail. She slowly ran her tongue over her thin lips. (Help me, her body said, as it painfully divided into two. I am helping, my paralysis replied.) Slow agony. Her entire body became swollen and deformed. At times, her eyes became pure eyelashes, avid as an egg in the process of being formed. Her mouth trembling with hunger. Then I almost smiled, as if stretched out on an operating table, and insisting that I was not suffering much pain. She did not lose sight of me: there were footprints she could not see, no one had passed this way before, and she perceived that I had walked a great deal. She became more and more distorted, almost the image of herself. Shall I risk it? Shall I give way to feeling? she asked herself. Yes, she replied to herself, through me.

And my first yes sent me into rapture. Yes, my silence replied to her, yes. Just as when my first son was born and I had said: yes. I had summoned the courage to say yes to Ofélia, I who knew that one can die in childhood without anyone noticing. Yes, I replied enraptured, for the greater danger does not exist: when you go, you go together, you yourself will always be there: this, this you will carry with you whatever may become of you.

The agony of her birth. Until then I had never known courage. The courage to be one's other self, the courage to be born of one's own parturition, and to cast off one's former body. And without being told whether it was worthwhile. 'I', her body tried to say, washed by the waters. Her nuptials with self.

Fearful of what was happening to her, Ofélia slowly asked me:

– Is it a chick?

I did not look at her.

– Yes, it's a chick.

From the kitchen came a faint chirping. We remained silent, as if Jesus had just been born. Ofélia kept on sighing.

– A tiny little chick? she confirmed, with some uncertainty.

– Yes, a little chick, I said, guiding her carefully towards life.

– Ah, a little chick, she said pensively.

– A little chick, I repeated, trying not to be unkind.

For some minutes now, I had found myself in the presence of a child. The transformation had taken place.

– It's in the kitchen.

– In the kitchen? she repeated, pretending not to understand.

– In the kitchen, I repeated, sounding authoritarian for the first time, and without saying anything more.

– Ah, in the kitchen, said Ofélia, shamming and looking up at the ceiling.

But she was suffering. Feeling almost ashamed, I became aware that I was taking my revenge at last. Ofélia was suffering, shamming, looking up at the ceiling. Her mouth, those shadows around her eyes.

– Why don't you go into the kitchen and play with the little chick?

– Me...? she asked slyly.

– Only if you want to.

I know that I should have ordered her to go rather than expose her to the humiliation of such intense desire. I know that I should not have given her any choice, and then she could say that she had been forced to obey. At that moment, however, it was not out of revenge that I tormented her with freedom. The truth is that this step, this step, too, she had to take alone. Alone and without delay. It was she who had to go to the mountain. Why — I wondered – why am I trying to breathe my life into her purple mouth? Why am I giving her my breath? How can I dare to breathe inside her, if I myself...is it only that she may walk, that I am giving her these painful steps? Am I only breathing my life into her so that one day she may momentarily feel in her exhaustion that the mountain has come to her?

Perhaps I had no right. But there was no choice. This was an emergency, as if the girl's lips were becoming more purple by the minute.

THE PRINCESS (V)

– Go and see the little chick only if you want to, I then repeated with the extreme harshness of someone saving another.

We stood there facing each other, dissimilar, body separated from body; united only by hostility. I sat still and composed in my chair so that the girl might cause pain to some other being, unyielding so that she might struggle inside me; I felt increasingly strong as I saw Ofélia's need to hate me, her determination that I should resist the suffering of her hatred. I cannot live this for you – my coldness told her. Ofélia's struggle came ever closer and then inside me, as if that creature who had been born and endowed me with the most extraordinary strength, were drinking from my weakness. In using me, she bruised me with her strength: she clawed me as she tried to cling to my smooth walls. At last the words came out in simmering rage:

– I'm off to see the chick in the kitchen.

– Yes, off you go, I said slowly.

She withdrew hesitantly, conscious of her dignity, even as she turned her back on me.

She re-emerged from the kitchen immediately – she looked startled, shamelessly holding out the chick in one hand and examining me from head to foot in her bewilderment.

– It's a little chick! she said.

She looked at the chick in her outstretched hand, then looked at me, then looked once more at her hand – and suddenly she became nervous and worried, which automatically made me feel nervous and worried.

– But it's a little chick! she said, and reproach flickered in her eyes at once as if I had not told her what was chirping.

I laughed. Ofélia looked at me, deeply offended. And suddenly – suddenly she laughed. Then we both laughed, somewhat stridently.

When we stopped laughing, Ofélia put the chick down on the floor to see it walking. When it ran, she went after it. She seemed to be giving the chick its freedom in order to provoke desire, but if it cowered, she rushed to its aid, pitying it for being subjected to her power: 'Poor little thing, he's mine': and when she held

the chick, it was with a hand deformed by delicacy. – Yes, it was love, tortuous love. He's very little and needs a lot of attention. One mustn't fondle him for that could be really dangerous; don't let people handle him unless they promise to be careful, and do as you think best, but corn is far too big for his little open beak; for he's very fragile, poor little thing, and so tiny; therefore, you shouldn't let your children play with him; I'm the only one who knows how to look after him; he keeps slipping all over the place, so the kitchen floor is clearly no place for a little chick.

For the last half hour I had been trying to get back to my typewriter in order to make up for lost time, while Ofélia's voice droned on. Little by little, she was only speaking to the little chick, and loving for love's sake. For the first time she had abandoned me, she was no longer me. I watched her, pure gold, and the chick, pure gold, and the two of them were humming like distaff and spindle. For me this also meant freedom at last and without any malice. Farewell. And I smiled with longing.

It was only much later that I realized that Ofélia was talking to me.

– I think – I think I'll put him in the kitchen.

– Off you go then.

I did not see her leave, nor did I see her return. At a given moment, quite by chance and somewhat distracted, I realized that there had been silence for some time. I suddenly looked at her. She was sitting with her hands folded on her lap. Without quite knowing why, I looked at her a second time.

– What is it?

– I...?

– Do you want to go to the lavatory?

– I...?

I gave up and carried on with my typing. Some time later, I heard a voice:

– I must go home now.

– Of course.

– If you don't mind.

I looked at her in surprise: Now then, if you wish...

– Well then, she said, I'll be going.

She walked away slowly and closed the door quietly behind her. I went on staring at the closed door. What a strange child you are, I thought to myself. I went back to my typing.

But I was stuck at the same sentence. Well – I thought impatiently, looking at my watch – now what's the matter? I sat there,

searching restlessly in my mind, searching in my mind to discover what was troubling me. Just as I was about to give up, I saw that impassive face again: Ofélia. Something started to cross my mind, when to my surprise, that face was leaning over me in order to be able to hear what I was feeling. I slowly pushed away the typewriter. Reluctantly, I began moving chairs out of the way, until I came to a halt in the doorway of the kitchen. On the floor lay the dead chick. Ofélia, I impulsively called after the girl who had fled.

From an infinite distance, I saw the floor. Ofélia. From afar, I tried in vain to reach the heart of that silent girl. Oh, don't be so frightened! Sometimes people kill for love, but I promise you that one day you will forget everything, I promise you! People do not know how to love, do you hear me, I repeated as if I might reach her before she should proudly serve nothingness in refusing to serve the truth. I who had forgotten to warn her that without fear there was the world. But I swear that this is breathing. I was very tired. I sat down on the kitchen stool.

Where I am still sitting, slowly beating the mixture for tomorrow's cake. Sitting, just as if throughout all these years I had been patiently waiting in the kitchen. Beneath the table today's chick shudders. The same yellow, the same beak. As we are promised at Easter, He will return in December. It is Ofélia who has not returned: she grew up. She went away to become the Indian princess whose tribe awaited her in the desert.

THE PERFECT ARTIST

I am not entirely certain whether it is in *Les données immédiates de la conscience* where Bergson states that the truly great artist is the one who has each and every one of his senses free from utilitarianism. The painter's sense of vision, like the musician's sense of hearing, is more or less free.

But the man who would be entirely free of conventional and utilitarian solutions would see the world, or rather, would possess the world as no artist ever possessed it. That is to say, completely, and in all its reality.

This raises an interesting question. Suppose we were able to educate, or not educate, a child, with the clear objective of keeping its senses alert and pure. By making certain that it should not be given any facts apart from the obvious ones. That the child should not *get used to things*. Let us also suppose that, in order to keep the child within the domain of commonsense which might provide a common denominator in his relationships with other human beings and the necessary stability in order to live, he were to be given a few basic notions to put into practice, such as food to be eaten and water to be drunk. And then left free to discover the rest for himself. Let us then suppose that this child turns into a practising artist.

Here the first problem arises: will he be an artist simply because of the education he has been given? Surely not, for art is not purity but purification; art is not liberty but liberation.

This child will become an artist from the moment he discovers that there is a utilitarian symbol in this pure thing with which we have been endowed. Therefore, he will practise his art if he follows the reverse path of those artists who have not been exposed to this unlikely education. He will unify the things of this world not because of their wondrous bounty but because of their remarkable utility. The child will liberate himself. If he turns out to be a painter, he might well end up by depicting nature in a painting where a man is seen eating the sky. We utilitarians can still manage to keep the sky beyond our reach. Notwithstanding Chagall. This is one of the few things we have not *exploited* so far. This child turned man-cum-artist will then

face the same fundamental problems which face the alchemist.

But if this man were only man and not an artist, he would not feel the need to transform things in order to impose greater reality – he would no longer feel any need for *art* and would shock us when he opens his mouth to speak. For he would say things with the candour of the man who has realized that the emperor is naked. We would consult him, like the blind and deaf people who wish to see and hear. We would have a prophet of the present rather than of the future. We would not have an artist. We would have an innocent. And art, as I see it, is not innocence, but becoming innocent.

Perhaps this explains why exhibitions of children's paintings, however beautiful, are not really art exhibitions. And explains why even when children paint like Picasso, it seems more fitting to praise Picasso than the children themselves. The child is innocent. Picasso became innocent.

HINDEMITH

A quartet by Hindemith – with which hand does he embark on the theme he has discovered? No, he keeps close to the wall, improvises on the melody he has just discovered, moves sideways, to the place where so many things happen. Sometimes he slides along the wall where the sun never reaches. Its mellowing would produce another music – another composer would make music from the mellowing of this quartet. Hindemith precedes any mellowing.

The melody would be the *event*. But what *event* takes place at night in a deserted cul-de-sac while we are all asleep? A tale of tranquil darkness, rooted in spent forces, and without any perfume. Hindemith's violin does not narrate. It unfolds and transforms itself. It is not austere, but austerity. And there is nothing abstract here. It represents the inaudible. There is scarcely any flesh on his quartet, that flesh which, although transparent and vulnerable, can also be found in Debussy, for example. What a pity the word *nervous* is associated with mournful vibrations, that *exposed nerves* are seen as an expression of suffering. Otherwise, the quartet could be described as one of nerves. Dark chords which are not played to evoke 'other things' or to touch on 'another theme'. These chords remain as they are and seek to express nothing else. It is difficult to play

this music by ear afterwards, it is impossible to sing those chords without studying them. And how can we study something which has no history? But one comes away with the memory of something *outside* the norm. With the feeling of having helped to create this music, of having slipped down the resinous trunk of a tree in a pleasant dream on a peaceful night. Only to insist: I dreamed of nothing. Is that enough? Of course, it is enough. Especially that absence of *error*. That emotional note of someone who could tell a lie but is not lying. Is that enough? Of course it is.

FEAR OF ERRING

I once asked an intelligent Swiss why there was no tradition of philosophical thought in Switzerland. In reply, he was quick to remind me that Switzerland has three separate peoples and four languages. From which one may deduce that the country has three or four different currents of thought. If Switzerland is to function properly as a nation, it needs to find the right balance to draw together the separate currents of thought into a single philosophy likely to satisfy the needs of all. So that would-be philosophers in Switzerland know from the outset that any victory will be one of compromise. The various currents of thought must meet half-way. Now any philosophical system, by its very nature, seeks to fulfil its ultimate objectives. It cannot accept compromise, except *a posteriori*. No philosophical system could ever be evolved if it were tacitly to accept it could only go so far and no further.

This is yet another aspect of Swiss neutrality. It does not function simply in relation to external aims. It is a principle which strives for internal harmony, precisely by taking into account the country's variety of peoples. It is a principle of appeasement rather than of peace. Being neutral does not resolve specific problems but, with time, being neutral has become an attitude of mind and a precautionary measure.

This admirable nation has developed its own concept of social and political organization. And little by little this has also become a concept of life.

An amalgam of priorities and needs has formed a culture which is so deeply rooted in its inhabitants that, if Switzerland were not made up of different peoples, one might easily fall into the habit of referring to its *national character*.

One can, however, talk of national traits – and the most noticeable thing about the Swiss character is its extreme caution.

The Swiss give the impression of being people who live in security and who, above all, are constantly guarding their security. This could be attributed to several factors such as the country's geographical location, the problems of agrarian production, and so on.

This attitude of caution is always being exercised. Often with damaging consequences.

Here in Berne, for example, it is not uncommon to see half the audience leave a concert hall before the second half of the programme devoted to *modern* music. Sometimes, even when the piece is being played for the first time in Switzerland.

And yet the Swiss genuinely enjoy music without any snobbery. The main reason for this extraordinary behaviour is their instinctive horror of anything *modern*, whether it be music, literature or art. The word *modern* sounds somewhat outrageous and risqué. There is also the wider and deeper consideration, however, that the Swiss abhor any error of judgment.

The literary supplements of Swiss newspapers will unearth the lost letters of Vigny or divine the hidden thoughts of Madame de Staël. They will mount a fierce attack when it seems convenient on the much-buried Renan and make excuses for the quarrelsome Victor Hugo. They will also seize every possible opportunity to commemorate some centenary or other and fill their pages with fulsome tributes: the number of centenaries they are capable of digging up is quite amazing.

This obsession has nothing to do with loving or respecting tradition. It stems from their fear of taking risks. A living writer is a constant risk. He is a man capable of betraying with a poor speech or a second-rate book those who admire his work.

The Swiss have come by nothing gratuitously. Everything in this country bears the stamp of noble effort, of patient conquest. And it is no mean achievement to have transformed their country into a universal symbol of peace.

And the inhabitants of this civilized nation – where the word *civilization* still has some meaning – keep error at bay by taking all the right precautions and by exercising mental discipline.

And yet many of them make a quiet exit by throwing themselves over the Kirchenfeld Bridge. And the newspapers make no mention of these suicides lest others try to follow their example. There is a price to be paid for security, peace, and the fear of erring.

RACING AGAINST THE TYPEWRITER

The world is so enormous, dear God, and to think that one day I shall have to die. How many moments have I left before death comes? I plead for more than moments. Not because those moments are so brief but because they are so rare and loving them can kill. Do I love you, precious moments? Reply, for life is slowly killing me. Do I love you, precious moments? Yes or no? I wish others to know what I shall never understand. I prefer to understand rather than be given explanations. Shall I have to spend my entire life waiting for Sunday to pass? And what about the charwoman from Raiz de Serra who gets up at four in the morning to work all day in the city before returning late at night to Raiz de Serra, where she falls into bed to be up at four next morning to go through the same exhausting routine. I shall tell you my mortal secret: living is not an art. Those who made such claims were lying. Ah! there are certain days when everything becomes so dangerous. But the typewriter goes faster than my fingers. The typewriter writes inside me. And I have no secrets apart from mortal ones. Those are all I need in order to become a creature with eyes, who will die one day. How can I explain what has just occurred to me? For I can now see that there is a price to be paid for everything, and that life is so costly it can even bring about death. To stroll through the countryside with a phantom-child is to walk hand-in-hand with what we have lost and, for all their beauty, those unending fields are of no help: hands clasp like claws for fear of getting lost. Perhaps it would be better to kill the phantom-child in order to be free? But what would then become of those great fields where no flowers have been planted other than that cruel little phantom-child? Cruel, because a child and demanding. Ah! I am too much of a realist. I walk alone with my own ghosts.

THE UNKNOWN BOOK

I am looking for a book to read. A very special book. In my mind's eye I imagine it as a face without features. I know neither

its title nor the name of the author. Who knows? Sometimes I feel I am looking for a book I myself might have written. I am not sure. Yet I have woven so many fantasies around this mysterious book that I have become deeply attached to it. Here is one of those fantasies: I might be reading when suddenly a phrase brings tears to my eyes. Overcome by sorrow and a sense of release, I then find myself saying: 'Dear God, now I know that everything is possible!'

THE LEARNED MAN

He now manages a shoe-shop. Not because he likes the job, but it was all he could find. He was forever asking himself: where did I go wrong? He meant in planning his future. There is no great mystery about becoming the manager of a shoe-shop. But once he himself poses the question and shows customers shoes as if he were not of this world, there is a reason for asking. Why, in fact? After all, he had been the brightest student of history at school and taken a keen interest in archaeology. But what he appeared to lack was any genuine appreciation of history or archaeology. All he had was learning. But no real understanding of prehistoric times when the world was uninhabited and fish had not yet been transformed into amphibians to provide food for humans. And to this day he sells shoes with the air of a scholar, as if his feet never touched this rough earth which wears out the soles of shoes.

THE HAUNTED ROOM

I want to tell you about the little room I put under a spell with my imaginings. It was in a rented apartment which was furnished. But let me say first of all that when reality is unmasked without fear, nothing in the world could be more agreeable and *real*. Reality, even if imaginary, has no dream and almost no future: its every moment belongs to the present. And there is no fear. It is extraordinary. In this reality unmasked by the imagination without fear, the richness is no longer behind us like some memory or about to appear from some desired future. It is there, and breathing.

Let me try to describe in the simplest possible words something which is far from simple. The little room, as I told you, was furnished. It was difficult to say if the arrangement of the furniture was intentional or whether, in fact, any arrangement existed. In all probability the first woman to occupy the apartment had decorated it without any conscious plan, making life easier for subsequent tenants. For the abundance in that sitting-room had nothing to do with our past or our reminiscences – it was there. There was no austerity in that room. On the contrary, it had a certain chic and charm. But the room was haunted. Oh, there was no ghost. It was haunted in its own right. The light – the light in the room was real enough – the light of space or the sky above – without any suggestion of shadows. And yet the objects in the room were obscured by the light.

And such a lack of comfort. There was not a single chair in that room where a person could sit in comfort. Perhaps that is why visitors behaved as if they were being bitten, kept moving from chair to chair, jumping to their feet, and looking out of the window and up at the ceiling as if in search of some means of escape. And no guarantee of safety anywhere. That was the problem. There was no guarantee of safety in that room. Either one accepted being lit up in some way by one's own ghost, or refused. There were no promises of any recompense.

There was a mirror in the room. It had been hung up in a silly position directly opposite the window – not to capture any view but simply the empty sky framed by the window – the mirror

had nothing to reflect, repeat or copy: the window had become a rectangle of light hanging on a wall.

That room offered no reassurance. But if anyone fearlessly accepted being lit up, they sat for a moment on the edge of that uncomfortable chair like this – they sat there and glowed.

People saw things in such different ways. We became as wicked as champagne. It was not exactly a nice feeling: the room became stifling. And mischievous as we were, we did not know how to react to all that splendour except by bubbling. And by laughing our heads off at the slightest thing.

Even when there were few visitors the room looked crowded. But never to the extent of people knocking into each other. Visitors entering that room for the first time were so intrigued by the objects there that they scarcely noticed each other as they peered first at one object, then another, inquisitive and contemptuous. There were moments of silence. And then water could be heard spurting from a tap. The noise was coming from the kitchen sink which was in need of repair. No one appeared to mind the silence. Everyone seemed to be holding back a smile or some item of news, as the room grew brighter and brighter.

Upon reflection, I cannot recall ever having seen a child in that room. Only people who were mature enough to drop from the tree and be squashed in all that brightness. No, there was not a child in sight. What I did see was a fat man who could not squeeze into those narrow chairs. Spurned and crestfallen, he became our great beetle in the light. I also saw a frail, abandoned woman enter. Her blue eyes were bulging and she clearly had thyroid trouble. As she entered, those bulging eyes momentarily distorted my vision: the room was that woman, that woman was the room. They merged like waters from the same waterfall. How could she close those enormous blue eyes when it was time to sleep? And what about the room? Where could it store all that light when it went to sleep? If only we could switch that room off for a second – what would happen? What great darkness made up of dead shadows would descend?

But the room had no place to store its light. Because I forgot to mention that the room was quite bare, despite the objects, furniture and people. There was no place to conceal oneself in that room. Everything was exposed.

One thing in particular happened to us. Richness was no longer behind us nor did we expect it any more for we were not adolescents: *today* had become such a perfect word that another

second would have destroyed it. *Today* would only have to leave the room in order to disintegrate. That room was neither *yesterday* nor *tomorrow*. And whenever we uttered the word *today*, it was as if a secret had been unmasked.

Wounded by the intense light of that bloated room, strange quarrels broke out amongst those present. Muted, short-lived quarrels about trivial things: flashes of lightning on a summer's day. For example, paper could not be found to wrap a gift for the landlady. What did a sheet of paper cost? Yet harsh words were exchanged. On another occasion, we spotted a grape-pip shining like a diamond on the floor. Joking among ourselves, we went down on our hands and knees and jostled each other in an attempt to claim the pip on the pretext that it would make a handsome tie-pin or brooch. At first we fought in jest, but friction soon broke out, tiny sparks were flying and there were angry explosions on all sides. Until I finally claimed the pip on the grounds that I had seen it first, only to be met by stony silence from the others. Needless to say, I threw it away the moment I left the room because the pip had been lying there for ages and was covered in grime. Only the odd trace of moisture had allowed it to glisten under the light.

What a cheerful room that was. We did everything possible to be invited there. We would arrive panting like a dog which had run for miles and come to die at its master's feet. Panting, our mouths became dry with all this happiness. Wide-eyed, curious and exhausted. But with no cause for complaint. The room had never made any reassurances or promised any rewards. It was simply life.

ADVENTURE

My intuitions become much clearer as I struggle to transpose them into words. In this sense, writing for me has become a necessity. On the one hand, because to write is a way of not falsifying sentiment (the involuntary transfiguration of imagination is only one way of arriving); on the other hand, I write because of my inability to understand except through the process of writing. If I assume a note of hermeticism, this is not only because the important thing is not to falsify sentiment but also because I am incapable of conveying sentiment in any clear way without falsifying it – to falsify thought would be to rob writing of its only satisfaction. So I often find myself assuming an air of mystery – something I find extremely tiresome in others. After I have written something, I suppose I ought to express it more clearly. But I am stubborn. And on the other hand, I respect a certain clarity peculiar to things of a mysterious nature which cannot be substituted by any other kind of clarity. I also believe that things clarify themselves with time: just as anything added to a glass of water settles at the bottom of the glass and the water remains clear.

...If ever that water should remain clear, so much the worse for me. I am prepared to take the risk. For like every other living being, I have taken greater risks. And if I take risks, it is not because of some arbitrary freedom, irresponsibility, or arrogance on my part. Each day when I awaken, almost out of habit I take a risk. I have always had a deep sense of adventure and by *deep* I mean *inherent*. This sense of adventure brings me into closer contact with reality and, in some muddled way, helps me to write.

HUMILITY AND TECHNIQUE

This inability to perceive, to understand, makes me instinctively...do what? Makes me seek a way of expressing myself which might help me to understand more readily. This way or 'style' (!) has been called several things, but never what it really

and exclusively is: a humble quest. I have never had any difficulty in expressing myself. My problem is much more serious: that of conception. When I speak of 'humility', I am referring to humility in the Christian sense (an ideal one may or may not achieve); I am referring to that humility which stems from total awareness of being truly incapable. And I am referring to humility as technique. Holy Mother of God, even I have been appalled at my lack of modesty; however unintentional. Humility as a technique is as follows: things should be approached with humility, otherwise they will elude us. I have discovered this type of humility which, ironically enough, is a form of pride. Pride is not a sin, at least not a grave sin: pride is a childish failing to which we succumb, like greed. Except that pride has the enormous disadvantage of being a grave error, with all the damaging consequences which error brings into our lives, because it makes us waste a great deal of time.

HEROISM

Even in Camus – this love of heroism. Is there then no other way? No, simply to understand is an act of heroism. So a man cannot simply open a door and look out?

AWAKENING SPRING

I take pride in being able to detect the first signs of spring. Something in the air tells me something fresh is on the way and I become all excited for who knows what reason.

Last spring a dear friend of mine gave me a plant. A primula, so mysterious that its mystery embraces the inexplicable explanation of a divine presence: the secret of the universe.

Notwithstanding its unremarkable appearance, this plant holds the secret of nature.

As spring approaches, the leaves of the primula wither, to be replaced by lots of tiny buds. Purplish and white in colour, even as buds these flowers have a powerful odour which is both masculine and feminine.

The secret of these buds is that they will open on the first day of spring and offer themselves to the world. How? How does this modest plant know that spring is just beginning? And the

buds suddenly open. You may be sitting there, lost in thought when, lo and behold, before your startled gaze those buds start to open, offering themselves to the new season. Spring is here. 'As the vine I put forth sweet-smelling fruits and my flowers are the fruits of glory and riches' (Ecclesiasticus 24: 17)

SOME USELESS EXPLANATION

It is not always easy to recall how and why I came to write a particular story or novel. Once they leave my pen, I too find them surprising and even strange. It is not the same as being in a 'trance', but the degree of concentration required in writing is such that it seems to take away all consciousness of everything extraneous to the actual writing. Some details, however, I can try to reconstruct, in the hope that they might be relevant and of some interest to the readers of *Family Ties*.

What I remember of the story entitled 'Happy Birthday', for example, is the impression of a birthday party that was not so very different from any other birthday party. I recall that it was held on a hot summer's day, although I make no mention of summer in the story itself. I received an *impression* and jotted down a few vague lines in haste in the hope that one day I might be able to re-examine the feelings I experienced. Years later, upon rediscovering those lines, the entire story was suddenly born and written with the speed of someone faithfully transcribing a scene in every detail – although nothing of what I wrote had actually occurred at that or any other birthday party. Some time later, a friend asked me to identify the old lady in the story. I explained that she was someone else's grandmother. But two days later, to my surprise the real answer suddenly came to me: I discovered that the old lady was my own grandmother whom I had never known as a child, apart from seeing a photograph and nothing more.

'Mystery in São Cristóvão' remains a mystery. I began writing this story as calmly as someone unwinding a bobbin of thread. I did not experience the slightest difficulty and I believe that the absence of any technical problems may be attributed to the way in which I conceived the narrative. The very atmosphere in this story dictated a mood of detachment to the extent even of non-participation. The remarkable ease with which I developed the theme might well have stemmed from some *inner technique* and my particular approach which was one of delicacy and feigned distraction.

As for 'The Daydreams of a Drunken Woman', I can confidently

say that I have rarely enjoyed anything so much. While writing this story, I was in a most happy frame of mind and, although others failed to notice, I even found myself speaking like the Portuguese woman in the narrative. 'The Daydreams of a Drunken Woman' made me experiment with the language and I enjoyed myself enormously.

Of the circumstances surrounding the title story of the collection, 'Family Ties', I can remember nothing.

About the writing of 'Love', two things come to mind. One is the intensity with which I suddenly identified with the woman in that sinister Botanical Garden, where we almost found ourselves trapped – ambushed and semi-hypnotized as we were – so that I had to force my woman character to summon the park attendant in a state of hysteria; otherwise we might still be locked up together in that park even now. The second thing I can clearly remember is a friend reading the manuscript of the story aloud in a familiar voice in order to let me appraise the result. Suddenly I felt that only at that moment was my story being born, perfectly formed like a newborn child. This was the greatest moment of all: the story was given to me there and then and I received it, or delivered it, and it was accepted, or both, since they are one and the same thing. I have nothing to say about 'The Dinner Party'.

It took me about thirty minutes to write 'The Chicken'. I had been asked to write a column. I made a feeble effort to write something but ended up abandoning the idea. Then one day I observed that what I had written was a narrative in the round and I could sense all the love and care I had put into it. 'The Chicken' betrays the affection I have always felt towards animals, whom I find more congenial than human beings.

'The Beginnings of a Fortune' was written as an experiment. I was curious to see what would emerge if I attempted a technique of such extreme simplicity that it would barely intermingle with the plot. The story was elaborated almost with indifference and my pen was guided by curiosity alone. More like practising scales than writing.

I find 'Preciousness' rather tiresome and I came to detest the young girl in the narrative. At one point I even felt like asking her forgiveness, only to back out at the eleventh hour. In the end, I tried to sort out her life, more in order to ease my conscience and discharge my responsibility than out of love. But to write in this manner is simply not worth the effort. It can be disconcerting and exhaust one's patience. I feel that even if I

could make something worthwhile out of this story, intrinsically it would still be unsatisfactory.

'The Imitation of the Rose' stemmed from several sources of inspiration. There was the initial shock upon hearing the news about someone who had fallen seriously ill and I failed to understand my reaction. On that same day, I received a bunch of roses which I shared with a friend. And there were other details which I no longer remember and which form the nucleus of any narrative. 'The Imitation of the Rose' gave me an opportunity to use a monochromatic tone which I find most pleasing: repetition always gratifies me, for the deliberate use of repetition denotes a gradual process of penetration, an insistent cantilena which has something to express.

'The Crime of the Mathematics Teacher' when first published was simply entitled 'The Crime'. Years later, I felt that the story seemed incomplete. So I decided to write it again. Somehow the impression lingers that the story is still unfinished. To this day I do not understand the Mathematics Teacher, although I am convinced that he is exactly as I have described him.

'The Smallest Woman in the World' reminds me of Sunday, of spring in Washington, of a child asleep in my arms while taking a stroll, of the first warm days in May – while 'The Smallest Woman in the World' (an article I read in a newspaper) heightened all of this in a continent which strikes me as being the world's birthplace – Africa.

I am convinced that this narrative, too, stems from my affection for animals: I tend to regard them as the species closest to God, matter which did not invent itself, something still warm from its own birth – yet something already on its feet and totally alive, living each moment to the full rather than taking life in easy stages, never sparing itself and virtually inexhaustible.

'The Buffalo' vaguely reminds me of the expression I once saw on a woman's face, or perhaps it was several women or even men; the story also reminds me of one of the countless visits I used to make to the zoological gardens. On this occasion, a tiger looked at me and I stared back. He kept on staring while I was obliged to turn my eyes away, and I can see him looking at me even now. The story itself bears no relation to this episode. It was written and put on one side. Some time afterwards I read it again and felt overcome with uneasiness and horror.

PEN DRAWING OF A LITTLE BOY

How can one ever come to know a little boy?

In order to know him, I must wait for him to drop his guard, and only then will he be within my grasp. There he is, a point in infinity. No one will know his today. Not even the little boy himself. As for me, I look, and it is useless: I cannot understand anything which is simply existent, totally existent. But I do know what it means to be a child. He is the little boy whose first teeth have just started to appear, and the same little boy who one day will become a doctor or a joiner. In the meantime – there he is, sitting on the floor, and I prefer to call his reality vegetative in order to be able to understand. There are thirty thousand such little boys sitting on the floor. Will they have the chance to build another world, one that will take into account that absolute reality to which we once belonged? In union there will be strength. There he sits, initiating everything anew, but for his own future projection, and without any real opportunity of initiating anything.

I do not know how to sketch the little boy. I know that it is impossible to sketch him in charcoal, for even pen and ink stains the paper beyond that subtle line of extreme actuality within which he lives. One day we shall domesticate him into a human being and then we shall be able to sketch him. For this is what we have done with ourselves and with God. The little boy will assist in his own domestication; he is keen and co-operative. He co-operates without knowing that the assistance we expect of him is for his own self-sacrifice. Recently, he has had a lot of practice. And so he will go on progressing until little by little – because of the essential good nature with which we achieve our salvation – he will pass from present time to continuous time, from meditation to expression, from existence to life. Making the great sacrifice of not being mad. I am not mad out of solidarity with the thousands of people who, in order to construct the possible, have also sacrificed the truth which would be madness.

But meanwhile, there he sits on the floor, immersed in a deep void.

From the kitchen his mother calls out anxiously: What are

you up to through there? Once called, the little boy gets up with difficulty. He totters, unsteady on his feet, all his attention concentrated within, his balance wholly internal. Once that has been achieved, all his attention turns outwards: he observes what the effort of getting to his feet has provoked. For getting up has had one effect after another: the floor moves unsteadily, the chair towers over him, the wall confines him. And on the wall there is a portrait of THE LITTLE BOY. It is difficult to look up at the portrait without leaning against a piece of furniture, and that is something he has still to learn. But his own awkwardness gives him support: what keeps him on his feet is precisely focusing his attention on the portrait above; looking up serves as a hoist. But he makes one mistake: he blinks. Blinking detaches him for a fraction of a second from the portrait which was supporting him. He loses his balance – and all at once, he falls on his bottom. His mouth gaping from all that human effort, the clear spittle trickling on to the floor. He examines the spittle at close quarters, as if it were an insect. He raises his arm and brings it forward in slow mechanical stages. Then suddenly, as if he were capturing something ineffable, with unexpected violence he squashes the spittle with the palm of his hand. He blinks and waits. Finally, having allowed sufficient time to pass, he carefully removes his hand and looks down at the floor, examining the fruit of this action. The floor is empty. With another brusque movement, he examines the palm of his hand: the spittle is stuck there. He has learned something new. Then, with his eyes wide open, he licks the spittle which belongs to the little boy. He thinks aloud: little boy.

– Who are you calling? his mother enquires from the kitchen.

With effortless charm he looks round the room and looks for the person his mother says he is calling; he turns his head and falls backwards. As he sobs, the room becomes distorted and refracted by his tears, the white volume grows until he cries out – Mummy! – he is gathered into strong arms, and suddenly the little boy finds himself in mid-air, cradled in an embrace which is warm and consoling. The ceiling is much closer now: the table down below. Overcome with exhaustion, the pupils of his eyes roll before sinking beneath the horizontal line of his eyes. He closes them over the final image, the wooden bars of his cot. The little boy falls asleep, worn out and peaceful.

The saliva has dried in his mouth. A fly beats against the window-pane. The little boy's sleep is streaked with light and

warmth, his sleep vibrates in the atmosphere. Until in a sudden nightmare, one of the words he has learned comes to mind; he shivers violently, opens his eyes. And to his horror, he sees nothing but the warm, clear emptiness of air – and no mother. His thoughts explode into sobs which fill the entire house. As he sobs, he starts to recognize himself, transforming himself into that child whom his mother will recognize. He grows almost weak from so much sobbing: he must transform himself immediately into something which can be seen and heard, otherwise he will remain alone, he must transform himself into something comprehensible, otherwise no one will understand him, no one will respond to his silence, no one will know him if he does not speak for himself. I shall do everything necessary so that I might belong to the others and the others belong to me; I shall skip over my real happiness which will only bring neglect; and I shall be good, anything for the sake of being loved. For what could be more magical than to weep in exchange for a mother?

Until that familiar noise comes through the door and the little boy, silent and intrigued by what a little boy can provoke, stops sobbing: Mummy. Mummy is: not to die. And he is reassured in the knowledge that he has a world to betray and to sell, and that he will sell it.

Yes, it is Mummy with a clean nappy in her hand. The minute he sees the nappy, he begins to sob once more.

– But you're soaking wet!

The news alarms him, curiosity is reawakened, but now his curiosity is comfortable and guaranteed. He looks blindly at his own wetness and, in a new phase, looks at his Mummy. But suddenly, he stops and listens with his whole body, his heart pounding in his tummy: honk-honk! he recognizes the noise with a sudden cry of victory and terror – the little boy has just recognized something!

– That's right! his mother says proudly, that's right, my darling, honk-honk has just passed along the street, I shall tell Daddy what you've learned today, that's just what it sounds like: honk-honk, my darling! his mother repeats, bouncing him up and down on her lap, lifting him by his legs, throwing him backwards, and then bouncing him up and down again. In all these postures, the little boy keeps his eyes wide open. They are as dry as a fresh nappy.

IMPASSE

She was sobbing. And as if the bright glare of the afternoon were not enough, she had red hair.

In the empty street, the stones vibrated with heat – the little girl's head was aflame. Seated on the steps in front of the house, she was bearing up. The street was deserted except for a solitary figure waiting in vain at the tram-stop. As if her submissive and patient gaze were not enough, her sobs kept coming back, causing her chin to tremble as it rested meekly on one hand. What was to be done with a sobbing little girl with red hair? We looked at each other in silence, dismay confronting dismay. In the deserted street there was no sign of a taxi. In a land of brunettes, to have red hair was an involuntary act of rebellion. Who cared if one day this red hair of hers would cause her to raise her woman's head with an air of defiance? For the present, she was seated on the doorstep which was sparkling under a hot sun at two o'clock in the afternoon. What saved her was a woman's discarded handbag, with a broken strap. She held it as if experienced in conjugal love, pressing it to her knees.

At that moment she was approached by her other half in this world, a soul-mate in Grajaú. The possibility of communication arose on a street-corner in a haze of sweltering heat; accompanying a woman and embodied in the image of a dog. It was a beautiful and wretched little basset-hound, sweet beneath the spell of its destiny. It was a red-haired basset.

There he came, trotting, ahead of his owner, dragging that long body of his. Suspecting nothing, tame dog.

The little girl opened her eyes in astonishment. Gently prepared, the dog stopped in his tracks before her. His tongue quivered. They eyed each other.

Among so many creatures who are ready to become the owners of another creature, there was the little girl who had come into this world to possess that dog. He trembled nervously without barking. She looked at him from under her fringe, spellbound and solemn. They seemed to be there for ages. A great sob shook her whole body as she watched him defiantly. The basset did not so much as flinch. She, too, overcame her sobbing and

continued to stare at him.

Both of them had short, red hair.

What did they have to say to each other? No one knows. All we know is that they communicated rapidly with each other, for there was no time to lose. We also know that, without speaking, they entreated each other. They entreated each other with urgency, embarrassment and surprise.

Trapped among so many vague obstacles under that hot sun, there was the solution for the red-haired girl. And among so many streets to be trotted, so many bigger dogs, and so many dry sewers – there was a little girl like the flesh of his own red flesh. They stared hard at each other, infatuated, remote from Grajaú. Another second and their hovering dream would shatter, yielding perhaps to the solemnity with which they entreated each other.

But they were both pledged. He to his imprisoned nature. She to her impossible childhood, the centre of that innocence which could only open out when she became a woman.

The dog's owner waited impatiently beneath her parasol. The red-haired basset finally detached himself from the little girl and trotted off as if in a dream. She remained there terrified, holding on to this encounter, stunned into a silence which neither a father nor a mother could understand. She accompanied the basset with black eyes, watching him in disbelief, slumped over the handbag pressed against her knees, until she saw him disappear round the next corner.

But he was stronger than she was. He did not look back even once.

BRAINSTORM

Oh, if I had only known. I would never have been born, oh, if I had only known, I would never have been born. Madness borders on the most humiliating wisdom. By absorbing madness, I became quietly hallucinated. The glass ring you gave me shattered into pieces but love did not end there. It was replaced by the hatred of those who love. For me, the chair is an object. Useless so long as I am looking at it. What is the time, please, so that I may know if I am living this moment? Creativity stems from some origin but today it eludes me and all I have is this incipient madness which is in itself a valid creation. I have no further interest in valid things. I am liberated or lost. I shall let you into a secret: life is mortal. We conveniently suppress this secret otherwise we should make each instant mortal. Ibrahim Sued claimed to be an unrobed member of the French Academy. As an object, the chair has always interested me. This one in the Empire style is an antique bought from an antique dealer in Berne. It would be difficult to envisage simpler lines, in contrast with the red upholstery. I love objects in so far as they do not love me. If I do not know what I am talking about, I am not to blame. I must talk because talking can be one's salvation. Yet I do not have a single word to say. The words already spoken have sealed my lips. What does one person say to another? Apart from 'How are you?' If people were suddenly to start being frank, what might they say to each other? Not to mention what they might say to themselves. But it would mean salvation, even though frankness is determined at a conscious level, and any horror of frankness comes from the part it plays in this vast unconsciousness which binds us to the world and to the world's creative unconsciousness. Tonight there will be stars in the sky: as promised by this sad evening which could be saved by a human voice. The most awful blindness is that of people who do not know they are blind. I open my eyes wide but it is useless: I can only see. But I neither see nor feel what is secret. The gramophone is broken, it is costly to mend, and to live without music is to betray the human condition which is surrounded by music. Besides, music is an abstraction of thought, I refer to the music of Bach, Vivaldi and Handel. *That Sweet Embrace*, how that song gets on my nerves

with its cloying words of affection. I can only write if I am free, and free of criticism, otherwise I give up. I look at the chair in the Empire style but this time I fancy it has been watching me. The future is mine so long as I am living. In future, there will be more time for living, and haphazardly for writing. In future, one will say: If I had known, I would never have been born. Marly de Oliveira, I scarcely ever write to you because I only know how to be intimate. I only know how to be intimate, whatever the circumstances: therefore I tend to be silent. Will we one day achieve all the things we have never done? Future technology threatens to destroy all that is human in man, but technology cannot touch madness: and so that is where all that is human in man can take refuge. I see flowers in a vase: they are wild flowers and were planted by no one. They are yellow and beautiful. But all my cook could say was: What ugly flowers. Simply because it is difficult to understand and appreciate anything which is spontaneous and austere. To understand complicated things is no advantage, but to love things which invite love is to progress up the human ladder. I am forced into telling so many lies. But I refuse to be obliged to lie to myself. For what would that leave me? Truth is the residue of all things and in my unconscious lurks the world's truth. The moon, as Paul Eluard once described it, is *éclatante de silence*. Who knows if we shall see the moon tonight for it is already late and there is nothing to be seen in the sky. I once accompanied my father to a spa in Minas Gerais. I looked up at the night sky, turning my head as I looked upwards, and the sight of all those stars made me feel quite dizzy. For there in the open countryside the sky is clear. If one thinks about it, there is no logic in the perfectly balanced illogicality of nature. And the same is true of human nature. What would become of the world or the universe if man did not exist? If I could always write as I am writing now, I would be in that mental turmoil people call a *brainstorm*. Who could have invented the chair? Someone who cared for himself. So he invented something for his greater comfort. The centuries passed and no one took any more notice of the chair which people take for granted. It takes courage to have a *brainstorm*: one can never tell what might turn up and give us a fright. The sacred monster died and in its place a little girl was born who lost her mother. I really must break off at this point not because words fail me, but because these are things, not to mention the ones I only thought about, which I never put into words. And things one does not publish in newspapers.

THE NATURE OF AN IMPULSE

I know that what I am about to say is extremely complicated but what can I do, if the following thoughts occurred to me so spontaneously and with such precision?

It was no more than an impulse. To be more precise, it was only impulse, and not *an* impulse. It would be misleading to say that this impulse held the woman because to hold would suggest a *state*. This was not a state. The effect of the impulse was to lead her progressively. Accustomed to arriving, she made that impulse lead her to some place or action. And this gave her the slightly uncomfortable feeling of betraying the non-transferable nature of the impulse. It would be quite wrong, however, to speak of the gratuitousness of the impulse, simply because we are dealing with something non-transferable. Used to 'buying and selling', acts which imply something conclusive, we come to believe that anything which is not *concluded* or *finished* has been interrupted with the loose ends untied. In fact, the impulse was *going* all the time. Once again this raises the question of distance: was it going far or near? And where was it going? And this in turn takes us back to the point I made earlier about feeling slightly uncomfortable when the application of an impulse is confused with the impulse itself. I am not suggesting that the application of the impulse causes any uneasiness. On the contrary, an impulse which has not been applied for some time can become so intense that the discomfort can only be relieved by its application. Afterwards, once the intensity has been relieved, what one might call the residue of an impulse is no longer the residue but the impulse itself – it is the impulse without an outburst of weeping (an outburst in the sense of accumulation, accumulation in the sense of excess), it is impulse without pressure (pressure in the sense of a change of rhythm, for any change of rhythm is, in fact, a change in pace and timing).

Bearing in mind, however, that we are a fact, that is to say, each one of us is a fact (for how could we cope with ourselves unless, like some essential prop, we treat ourselves as a fact?) we tend to transform what is (or *exists*) into facts, to transform the impulse into its application. And to render tonal the atonal.

And to give a *finite* to the infinite, with a series of finites (infinite in the sense of an imminent *quality* rather than immeasurable quantity). The disturbing factor here is that, however drawn-out the series of *finites*, this does not exhaust the residual quality of the infinite (which, in fact, is not residual but the infinite itself). None of this would cause any uneasiness were it not for the confusion between *to be* and the use of *to be*. The use of *to be* is temporary, even if it seems continuous. For it is only continuous in the sense that one use is immediately followed by another. To be precise, one use is *mediately* followed by another, for even between the number one and the number one we can perceive a *one*. That one between the other two can only be described as residual if we choose to give the other two numbers *one* greater importance that the intermediate *one*. The latter is atonal; it is impulse.

Needless to say, the woman who was thinking about this was not *thinking* in the strict meaning of the word. She was what one might describe as engrossed or lost in thought. So much so, that when her abstraction (deep thought in the sense of being *unthinkable* and *beyond expression*) momentarily weakened, she succumbed to the use of the word-cum-thought (which transformed her into a fact). From that instant she momentarily became a fact in thought – she fastened on to herself for a second, stumbled for a second like a sleep-walker colliding with a chair; she sighed for a second, in part involuntarily, to relieve what had become so intense, in part voluntarily, to hasten, to hasten her own metamorphosis into something factual.

The fact (which made her sigh) into which she had become transformed was that of a woman with a broom in her hand. She felt a sudden twinge of suppressed rebellion – not, as one might think, because she was the fact of a woman with a broom in her hand – but that twinge of rebellion which can be almost agreeable when one is more or less occupied (for when air moves it becomes a breeze). Busying oneself was a channelling, channelling was a necessary limitation, and limitation an essential unawareness of what is to be found between the number one and the number one.

As previously stated, this rebellion was almost agreeable and became more and more agreeable until her self-absorption gave her profound satisfaction. Possessed of its own atonality, it became what is called music, that is to say audible. Naturally, there lingered, like a taste in one's mouth, the atonal sensation

of atonal contact with atonal impulse.

This brought an expression into the woman's eyes which could only be described as bovine. Things tend to assume the form of one's own factual existence (the way in which existent things become a fact is sudden and infinitesimal). With a broom in one hand, while she drew back her hair with the other, the woman finished sweeping up the bits of broken glass. It was the unexpected breaking of the glass which had artificially created a *finite* and made her move swiftly to the *one* between the other two. Wasting no time, she retrieved the last bits of broken glass. Having glimpsed those vigorous movements, the man who was in the room could not fathom what he had seen but once having seen it, he said tentatively, aware that he was not expressing his own perception: the floor is clean now.

HATEFUL CHARITY

Was it an afternoon of sensitivity or susceptibility? I was walking hurriedly along the street, deep in thought, as sometimes happens. When suddenly, there was a tugging at my skirt. Thinking my skirt had got caught on something, I turned round and saw a grubby little hand. It belonged to a small boy whose squalor and the blood coursing through his veins brought a glow to his cheeks. The child was standing in the doorway of a large pâtisserie. It was his eyes, rather than his half-garbled words, which made me aware of his patient distress. Too patient by far. I vaguely perceived a plea, before understanding what it really meant. Somewhat perplexed, I looked at him, still uncertain whether my thoughts had really been interrupted by that child's hand.

– Something to eat, lady, buy me something to eat.

I finally woke up. What had I been thinking of before encountering this child? The fact is that his plea seemed to fill a void, to offer a reply which could serve for any question, just as a heavy downpour of rain can quench the thirst of someone who only wanted a few drops of water.

Without looking around me, perhaps because I felt embarrassed, I carefully avoided looking at the tables inside where some acquaintance might be seated having tea or eating ice-cream, I went up to the counter and said with a firmness only God can explain: Give this child a pastry.

What was I afraid of? I was not looking at the child and wanted to get this humiliating episode over and done with as soon as possible. I asked him: Which pastry do you...?

Before I could finish, the boy told me, quickly pointing with his finger: that one there with chocolate on top.

Bewildered for a second, I quickly recovered and brusquely ordered the assistant to serve him.

– What else would you like? I asked the swarthy child.

Impatiently fidgeting with his hands and mouth as he waited to be served the first pastry, he paused, looked at me for a moment and said with unbearable delicacy, baring his teeth: I don't want another one. He was sparing my generosity.

– Go on, have another one, I insisted eagerly, pushing him forward. The child hesitated, then said: the yellow one made with egg yolks. He received a pastry in each hand and held them above his head as if afraid of crushing them. Even the pastries were out of the reach of that dark-skinned boy. And without even looking at me, he did not so much disappear as escape. The assistant was looking on:

– So he found a charitable soul at long last. That little fellow has been hanging round the door for over an hour begging from passers-by, but they all ignored him.

I walked away, flushed with shame. But was it really shame? I tried without success to revive my earlier thoughts. I was swamped by feelings of love, gratitude, rebellion and shame. But as the saying goes, the Sun shone brighter than ever. I had had the opportunity of...An opportunity provided by a thin, dark-skinned child...by a child to whom others had denied a pastry.

And what about the people having tea and eating ice-cream? Now then, what I wanted to know with self-inflicted cruelty was this: had I been afraid that the others might have seen me or that the others might not have seen me? The fact is that when I crossed the street, what could have been compassion had already been stifled by other feelings. And now that I was alone, my earlier thoughts slowly returned but they were meaningless.

Instead of taking a taxi, I caught a bus. I found a seat.

– Are my parcels in the way?

– The woman who spoke had a baby on her lap and various parcels wrapped in newspapers at her feet. Not at all, I reassured her. 'De dum, de dum, de dum' prattled the baby girl, stretching out her tiny hand and grabbing the sleeve of my dress. 'He likes you', the mother said smiling. I returned her smile.

– I've been on the road all morning, the woman informed me. I went to visit some friends but they were not at home. One had gone out to lunch, the other was off somewhere with her family.

– And what about your little girl?

– He's a boy, she corrected me, he's dressed in girl's clothes but he's a boy. I've fed him. But I haven't had anything to eat yet.

– Is he your grandson?

– My son, he's my son, I have three more. The child's taken a fancy to you...Play with the lady, my little one! Would you believe that we live in what is no more than a narrow corridor and it costs us a fortune. We still owe last month's rent. And

we'll soon be at the end of *this* month. The landlord wants us out. But God willing, I'll find the two thousand *cruzeiros* I still owe him. I've got the rest. But he won't accept it. He thinks that if I pay him some in advance, he'll never see the rest.

That unfortunate woman was experienced in the ways of mistrust. There was nothing she did not know, but felt obliged to act as if she knew nothing – the reasoning of the powerful banker. She reasoned as a cautious landlord would reason without allowing things to upset her.

But I suddenly turned cold. The penny had dropped. The woman went on talking. Whereupon I took two thousand *cruzeiros* from my bag and, filled with self-loathing, I handed the notes to the woman. Without a moment's hesitation, she grabbed the notes and pushed them into a secret pocket concealed between her various skirts, almost dropping the baby boy-cum-girl in her haste.

– May the Good Lord reward you, she blurted out as readily as a beggar-woman.

Turning crimson, I continued to sit there with folded arms. The woman went on sitting beside me.

But we no longer spoke. She had more dignity than I suspected. Once she had got the money, she had nothing more to say to me. And I was no longer allowed to fuss over that little boy dressed as a girl. I deserved at least that little pleasure, having paid for it in advance.

What I am trying to say is that a certain uneasiness had descended upon the woman and myself.

– Leave the lady in peace, Zezinho, she scolded the child.

We avoided any contact with our elbows. There was nothing more to be said, and it was a long journey. Dismayed, I looked at her out of the corner of my eye. She looked weary and unwashed. And the woman knew I had given her a furtive look.

Then an atmosphere of resentment sprang up between us. Only that tiny hybrid infant continued to glow with happiness, his gentle prattling resounding throughout the bus: 'De dum, de dum, de dum.'

DIVINE WISDOM

It was most certainly not my day for theosophy. And guess what? I hailed a taxi with a driver who decided he liked me and proceeded to instruct me in divine wisdom. I could scarcely have been feeling less spiritual. The driver – a handsome man with grey hair and a distinguished appearance – chattered on without my listening. But I pricked up my ears when he began to speak about fraternity and found myself reacting rather strangely: I did not feel in the least fraternal. I was alone in the world. But there was one thing that caught my attention because it is mine as well, even on a day of pure materialism. Let me try to explain. The driver pointed out that our cycle in this world was coming to an end with the year two thousand, and that we were sadly unprepared. I listened carefully. I also feel that the year two thousand is upon us. I feel so advanced, even if I cannot put it into words. I feel as if I am already in another cycle, difficult as that is to explain. I even feel myself to be beyond writing. An inhabitant of Mars perhaps? Most definitely not. There is little I wish to know. And the year two thousand is already upon us, not because of Mars but because of the Earth itself; because of us, of our voracity to pursue time, because of the voracity of time itself as it devours us. It is only when it comes to hunger that we are not in the year two thousand. But there are different forms of hunger and I am referring to all of them. And our hunger for something other than food is so great that we devour who knows how many years and exceed two thousand. The things I have learned from taxi-drivers could fill a book. They know a great deal: and literally circulate that knowledge. I daresay they do not know as much as me about the films of Antonioni. Although they might, even without knowing it. For there are a number of ways of knowing, without even being conscious of it. This is something I have experienced. It often happens to me as well.

FREEDOM

My relationship with a friend has become so simple and free that I often telephone her and, when she picks up the receiver, I explain I am not in the mood for conversation. So I say goodbye, replace the receiver and occupy myself with something else.

INTERROGATION

Are we using our life or not when we fritter it away? What precisely am I trying to find out?

CRUELTY

When I think of the eager enjoyment with which we sit down to that Brazilian delicacy, chicken cooked in its own blood, I begin to realize how cruel we humans are. Personally, I could never kill a chicken for I adore watching them as they stretch their ugly necks and scratch for worms. So should we avoid eating chicken cooked in its own blood? Of course not. We must never forget that we are cannibals. We must respect our cruelty. For who knows, perhaps if we were to stop eating chicken cooked in its own blood, we might start devouring human beings instead. My cowardice about eating chickens, even if I am prepared to eat them once they have been cooked, leaves me puzzled and bothered, yet I accept it. Life is cruel. We are born in blood as the umbilical cord is cut. And so many human beings die shedding their blood. We must believe in blood as part of life. Cruelty. But also love.

THE IMMORTAL MAN

Forgive me if I seem always to be writing about taxi-drivers. One of these days, I shall end up marrying a taxi-driver to avoid listening to any more of their tall stories. The conversation went like this:

– I'm going to sell up and emigrate to the United States.

I said nothing.

– There's too much red-tape here in Brazil.

I continued to say nothing.

– Well, that's not exactly true. I'm emigrating because I want them to freeze me.

– What?

– When people die in the States, they freeze the corpse and then defrost it later. And I'm scared of dying. Aren't you?

The answer was no. I felt much more scared of him.

– And what happens when they defrost you?

– I'll come back to life.

– But surely only to die again?

– Then they'll freeze me again.

– So, you'll never die?

– That's right.

IN QUOTES

When I start rummaging through old papers, it means dust everywhere while I fret and fume. Reluctant to admit that my memory is unreliable, I am forever writing down words and phrases which strike a chord, without making a note of the author's name. Only to discover afterwards that I can no longer remember. Here are some examples:

'Here on earth we can see that opposites often coalesce, that positive values are acquired at the expense of negative ones. And who knows, perhaps that most profound of metaphysical experiences – which comes with an awareness of the absolute, with that exciting glimpse of spiritual bliss allowing us access to the supernatural – is only possible when the soul is so unhinged that it can no longer rise from the ruins.'

'What may seem incoherent in the cold light of reason, can often have meaning for the heart which understands it.'

'It is impossible to acquire any intuitive knowledge of another world without sacrificing some of the understanding we need to cope with the world in which we live.'

A MOMENT OF DESPONDENCY

There must be a mistake somewhere: for when I write, however well I may express myself, I have the feeling of not really having expressed myself at all. This has left me so disheartened that I now take greater care to try and express myself than in the expression itself. I am aware that this may only be a passing whim. Nevertheless, I am aiming for a kind of silence. Even while continuing to write I shall exploit silence. And if there exists such a thing as expression, let it emanate from what I am. Instead of: 'I express myself, therefore I am', it will now be a case of: 'I am; therefore, I am.'

THE EXPEDIENTS OF A PRIMITIVE BEING

I once read that hysterical behaviour is a reaching out for liberation by means of wild gestures. Unaware of the movements needed to secure their release, animals become hysterical and lose all control. And in their frenzy they often discover the right gesture to gain their freedom.

This reminds me of the liberating advantages of a primitive existence which is purely emotional. However hysterical, the primitive person draws upon so many contradictory feelings that the one capable of bringing a sense of freedom finally comes to the surface, even if that person does not know it.

ABOUT WRITING

I often get the impression that I write out of avid curiosity. For when I write, I never fail to surprise myself. As I write, I become conscious of things I knew all the time without being aware that I knew them.

FORM AND CONTENT

Reference is constantly being made to the conflict between form and content in creative writing. One even hears critics comment: The content is good, however the form is mediocre, etc. Form and content cannot be separated at will. That would be far too easy. It would be like expressing by means of form what already exists in its own right: in other words, content. The conflict between form and content lies in the thought itself: the content struggles to find its form. One simply cannot speak of content divorced from form. Intuition alone touches on truth without being dependent on either form or content. Intuition is that deep, unconscious reflection which dispenses with form as it begins to surface and take on its own shape. Form, in my opinion, starts to emerge when the total entity is in full possession of content, if we must divide the thinking and writing into two separate phases. The problem of form lies in the nature of the content itself, in the thinking or feeling, neither of which could exist without the appropriate form, which is often unique.

1970

A MISCHIEVOUS LITTLE GIRL (I)

Whatever his previous occupation had been, he had abandoned it, changed his profession and drifted half-heartedly into teaching in a primary school: that was all we knew about him.

The teacher was burly, tall and silent, with rounded shoulders. He wore a jacket that was far too short and rimless spectacles, with a thin band of gold bridging his great Roman nose. And I was attracted to him. Not in love with him, but drawn by his silence and his self-control as he tried to teach us. Watching him conceal his impatience made me resentful. I started to misbehave in class. I talked in a loud voice, pestered my classmates and interrupted the lesson with silly jokes until the teacher, turning red in the face, would say:

– Be quiet or I'll send you out of the room.

Wounded but triumphant, I would answer back defiantly: Send me out then! But he didn't send me out, for that would have made him look foolish. I exasperated him so much that it had become painful for me to be an object of hatred for that man whom I somehow loved. I did not love him like the woman I would be one day; I loved him like a child awkwardly trying to protect an adult, with the anger of someone who has not yet become a coward and sees a strong man with such round shoulders. He bothered me. At night, before I went to sleep, he bothered me. I was scarcely nine years old, a difficult age like the unbroken stem of a begonia. I goaded him and when I finally succeeded in making him lose his temper, I could taste, in glorious martyrdom, the unbearable acidity of the begonia when crushed between the teeth; and I bit my nails in triumph. In the morning, as I walked through the school gates, feeling refreshed, nourished on coffee and milk, and with my face washed, it startled me to meet in the flesh the man who had clouded my thoughts for one abysmal moment before falling asleep. On the surface of time it was only a moment, but in the depths of time they were bygone centuries of the darkest sweetness. In the morning – as if I had not counted on the real existence of that man who had unlocked my black dreams of love – in the morning, confronted by that enormous man with his short jacket, I was thrown into

a state of confusion, bewilderment, and alarming hope. Hope was my greatest sin.

Each day I renewed the futile struggle which I had begun in order to save that man. I wanted what was good for him, and in return, he hated me. Bruised, I became his demon and tormentor, the symbol of the hell it must have been for him to teach that smirking, inattentive class. Never to give him a moment's peace had become a sadistic pleasure. The game, as always, fascinated me. Without knowing that I was observing time-honoured traditions, yet with that insight with which the wicked are born – those wretches who bite their nails in terror – without knowing that I was conforming to one of the most common situations in the world, I was playing the whore and he the saint. No, perhaps not. Words rush ahead of me, they seduce and transform me, and if I am not careful it will be too late: things will be said before I have even uttered them. Or, at least, it was not only that. My confusion stems from the fact that a rug is woven from so many threads that I cannot resign myself to pursuing one only; my confusion stems from the fact that a story is made up of many stories. And I cannot narrate all of them, for the resounding echoes of some greater truth might bring my vast glaciers toppling down the precipice. So I shall say no more about the maelstrom that raged within me as I daydreamed before falling asleep. Otherwise, even I will begin to think that it was only that subdued whirlpool which drew me towards him, forgetting my desperate sacrifice. I became his temptress, a duty which no one had imposed on me. It was sad that the task of saving him by means of temptation should have fallen into my clumsy hands because, of all the adults and children there, probably no one was less capable. 'These aren't flowers for smelling', as our maid used to say. But it was as if, finding myself alone with a mountaineer paralysed by his terror of the precipice, I could not but try to help him descend, however ill-equipped I might feel. The teacher had suffered the misfortune of finding himself alone in his wilderness with the most foolhardy of his pupils. Whatever the risk, I felt obliged to pull him over to my side because his was fatal. And that was what I did, like a tiresome child tugging at the tails of a grown-up's jacket. He did not look back nor ask what I wanted, and shook me off with a slap. I went on tugging at his jacket, for persistence was my only weapon. He only noticed that I was tearing his pockets. The truth is, I myself was scarcely aware of my behaviour. My life with the teacher was

invisible. Yet I sensed that my role was wicked and dangerous: it drove me to a craving for a real existence that was slow in coming. More than clumsy, I even enjoyed tearing his pockets. Only God could forgive what I was, because He alone knew of what matter He had made me and for what purpose. So I allowed myself to be His matter. Being God's matter was my only virtue. And the source of a nascent mysticism. Not mysticism for Him, but for His matter, for a raw life filled with pleasure. I worshipped. I accepted the vastness of things beyond my understanding and confided therein the secrets of the confessional. Was it towards the dark depths of ignorance that I was luring the teacher with the zeal of a cloistered nun? A happy and monstrous nun, alas! Not even of this could I boast: in the classroom we were all equally monstrous and sweet, the avid matter of God.

But if the teacher's heavy round shoulders and his tight jacket moved me, my outbursts of laughter only made him all the more determined to pretend that he had forgotten me, and all that self-control made him look even more deflated. The hatred this man felt for me was so strong that I began to hate myself. Until my outbursts of laughter finally supplanted my impossible waywardness.

A MISCHIEVOUS LITTLE GIRL (II)

As for learning, I did not learn anything during those lessons. The game of making him unhappy had taken much too great a hold over me. Enduring with undisguised resentment my lanky legs and my ever shabby shoes, mortified at not being a flower, and, above all, tortured by an enormous childhood which I feared would never end – I was determined to make him even more unhappy and I flaunted my only wealth: the flowing hair which I planned to have beautifully permed one day and, in anticipation of the future, I tossed my hair at every opportunity. As for studying, I did not study. I trusted in my idleness which had never let me down and which the teacher accepted as one more provocation from a horrid little girl. In that he was mistaken. The truth is that I had no time to study. Happiness kept me occupied, remaining attentive took up days and days of my time: there were the history books which I read passionately, biting my nails to the quick, a refinement which I had recently discovered in my first ecstatic moments of sadness. There were the boys whom I had chosen but who had not chosen me. I spent hours suffering because they were unattainable, and yet more hours suffering by tenderly accepting them, for man was my King of Creation; there was the hopeful threat of sin, and I occupied myself with anxious waiting; not to mention how I was constantly preoccupied with wanting or not wanting to be what I was. I could not decide which part of me I did want, but I could not accept all of me; having been born was to be full of errors that needed correcting. No, it was not to irritate the teacher that I did not study; I only had time to grow. Which I did on all fronts, with a gracelessness that suggested some miscalculation; my legs did not go with my eyes and my mouth twitched while my grubby hands dangled at my sides – in my haste I grew without any sense of direction.

A photograph from that time reveals a healthy girl, savage and gentle, with thoughtful eyes under a heavy fringe, and this real image does not belie me, yet it portrays a ghostly stranger whom I would not understand even if I were her mother. Only much later, after I had finally accepted my physical presence and

become essentially more secure, could I bring myself to study a little; before that, however, I could not risk learning, I did not wish to unsettle myself – I took intuitive care with what I was, since I did not know what I was, and I proudly cultivated the integrity of ignorance. What a pity the teacher was never to see the person I unexpectedly became four years later: at thirteen, with clean hands, freshly bathed, quite self-possessed and pretty, he would have seen me looking like a Christmas poster displayed on the veranda of a large house. But, instead of the teacher, a former chum of mine walked by and called out my name, without realizing that I was no longer a tomboy but a dignified young lady whose name could not be called out along the city pavements. 'What is it?' I asked the intruder coldly. I then received the news aloud that the teacher had died that morning. Pale, and with wide eyes, I looked at the street swirling beneath my feet. My composure shattered like a broken doll.

Going back four years. Perhaps it was because of everything I have just narrated, mixed up and jumbled together, that I wrote the composition the teacher had assigned, the dénouement of this story and the nucleus of others. Or perhaps it was only because I wanted to finish my work as quickly as possible and play in the park.

– I am going to tell a story, he said, and you will write a composition. But use your own words. When you have finished, you may go out to play without waiting for the bell.

This was the story: a very poor man dreamed that he had discovered treasure and had become very rich. On awakening, he packed his bundle and went in search of the treasure but travelled the wide world without finding anything. Weary of travelling, he returned to his modest house and, since he had nothing to eat, he started to plant seeds in his poor little yard; he planted so much, reaped so much, and began to sell so much, that he ended up a very rich man.

I listened with disdain, blatantly playing with my pencil, as if I wanted to make it quite clear that his stories did not fool me and that I knew everything there was to know about him. The teacher told the story without looking even once in my direction. Clumsy in my efforts to love him, I took pleasure in persecuting him, I pursued him with my gaze: I answered everything he said with a simple direct glance, which nobody in all conscience could have condemned. The look I affected was quite angelic and pure, completely open, like innocence confronting crime.

And it always achieved the same result: perturbed, he avoided my eyes, and began to stutter. And this filled me with a sense of power that condemned me. And with pity. Which, in its turn, irritated me. It irritated me that he should force a nasty little brat like me to understand a man.

It was almost ten in the morning and the recreation bell was about to ring. My school was a rented building in one of the city parks and had the biggest playground I had ever seen. It afforded me as much pleasure as it might have given a squirrel or a horse. It had trees scattered here and there, rising and falling expanses of lawn. It seemed never-ending. Everything there was incredibly spacious, made for the long legs of a little girl, with space for piles of bricks and wood of unknown origin, for thickets of sour begonias which we ate, for sunlight and shadows where bees made honey. There was room there for an abundance of fresh air. And we lived life to the full; we rolled down every slope, whispered earnestly behind every pile of bricks, ate the different varieties of flowers, and into all the tree trunks we carved with our penknives dates, sweet obscenities and hearts pierced with arrows: girls and boys made their honey there.

A MISCHIEVOUS LITTLE GIRL (III)

I was finishing my composition and the scent of the hidden shadows was already beckoning me. I hurried. Since I only knew how 'to use my own words', writing was simple. What also made me hurry was the desire to be the first to walk down to the front of the classroom – the teacher had ended up banishing me to the back row – and to hand in my composition defiantly, just to show him how quick I could be, a quality which struck me as being essential in order to live and which, I felt sure, the teacher could not fail to admire.

I handed him my notebook and he took it without even looking at me. Offended that he should not have praised my quickness, I skipped out into the big park.

The story which I had transcribed into my own words was exactly the same as the one he had narrated. Except that even then I was beginning to 'extract the moral of the story', which made me feel virtuous but later threatened to smother me, I was becoming so inflexible. Anxious to impress him, I added on several phrases of my own at the end. Phrases which hours later I read and re-read to see what there was in them that had finally succeeded in provoking that man when I myself had so far failed. Probably what the teacher had wanted to make implicit in his sad tale was that hard work is the only way to make a fortune. Facetiously, I drew the opposite moral: something about the hidden treasure, which exists where one least expects to find it, which is only waiting to be discovered. I think I talked about squalid backyards with hidden treasure. I cannot remember, I do not know if those were my precise words. I cannot imagine with what childish phrases I expressed a simple idea which somehow turned into something complicated. I suppose that by wilfully contradicting the real meaning of the story, I had somehow promised myself in writing that idleness rather than work would yield me many gratuitous rewards, the only rewards to which I aspired. It is also possible that even then the theme of my existence was irrational hope, and that my perverse stubbornness was already manifest. I would give everything I possessed for nothing, but I wanted everything in return for nothing.

Unlike the labourer in the story, in my composition I shrugged off all responsibilities and came away free and poor and carrying treasure in my hands.

I went out to play, only to find myself alone with the useless reward of having been the first to finish, raking the soil with my foot, waiting impatiently for my classmates who, one by one, emerged from the classroom.

In the midst of our rowdy games, I decided to look for something or other in my satchel to show to the park-warden, my friend and protector. Dripping with perspiration, flushed with an irrepressible happiness which, had I been at home, would have earned me a few slaps – I fled in the direction of the classroom, crossed it at a run, so flustered that I did not see the teacher leafing through the notebooks piled on his desk. The object I had gone to fetch was already in my hand and I was just about to run out again – when my eyes met his. Standing alone by his desk, he looked at me.

It was the first time we had come face to face on our own. He was staring at me. My steps faltered almost to a standstill.

For the first time I found myself alone with him, without the whispered support of my classmates, without the admiration that my insolence aroused. I tried to smile, feeling the blood rushing to my cheeks. A bead of sweat ran down my forehead. He was looking at me. His look was like a soft, heavy paw resting on me. But if that paw was soft, it froze me like a cat's paw as it quickly catches a mouse by the tail. The bead of sweat ran down over my nose and on to my mouth, cutting my smile in half. Just that: his face drained of any expression, he was staring at me. I began to skirt the wall with lowered eyes, taking refuge in my smile, the only feature left in a face which had otherwise become blurred. I had never noticed before just how long the classroom was; only now, at the slow pace of fear, could I judge its real dimensions. Lack of time had not allowed me to perceive until that moment just how bare and high and solid those walls really were. I could feel the solid wall against the palm of my hand. In a nightmare, in which smiling played some part, I scarcely believed that I could reach the doorway – from where I would run, oh, how I would run! and hide amongst the other children. As well as concentrating on my smile, I was most careful not to make any noise with my feet, and thus I adhered to the intimate nature of a danger about which I knew nothing more. With a shudder, I caught a sudden glimpse of myself as if

in a mirror: a perspiring thing pressed against the wall, advancing slowly on tiptoe, my smile becoming brighter. My smile had frozen the room into silence and even the sounds that came from the park reverberated on the outer shell of silence. I finally reached the door, and my unruly heart began to beat so loudly that it threatened to awaken the immense world from its sleep.

That was when I heard my name.

Suddenly rooted to the spot, my mouth parched, I stood there with my back to him, much too scared to turn round. The breeze which came from the open door had dried the perspiration on my body. I turned round slowly, restraining within my clenched fists the urge to run.

A MISCHIEVOUS LITTLE GIRL (IV)

At the sound of my name the room had become dehypnotized.

And very slowly I began to see the teacher in his entirety.

Very slowly I saw that the teacher was huge and ugly, and that he was the man of my life. A new and greater fear. Small, sleep-walking, alone, I confronted what my fatal freedom had finally brought me to. My smile, which was all that remained of my face, had also been obliterated. I was a pair of numbed feet too paralysed to move, and a heart so parched that I might die of thirst. There I stood, out of the man's reach. My heart was dying of thirst, yes. My heart was dying of thirst.

As calm as if he were about to commit a murder in cold blood, he said:

– Come closer...

How did a man avenge himself?

Was I about to receive like a smack in the face, the ball of the world which I myself had thrown to him and which none the less I did not understand?

Was I about to retrieve a reality which would not have existed if I had not rashly perceived it, thus giving it life? To what extent was that man, a mountain of compact unhappiness, also a mountain of fury? But my past was too remote now. A stoic repentance kept my head erect. For the first time ignorance, which until then had been my faithful guide, abandoned me. My father was at work, my mother had been dead for several months. I was the only me.

– Take your notebook, he added.

I looked at him suddenly in surprise. Was this all, then? The unexpected relief was almost more alarming than my former fear. I took a step forward, and hesitantly held out my hand.

But the teacher remained still and made no attempt to hand over my notebook.

To my sudden distress, without averting his gaze the teacher slowly began to remove his spectacles. He looked at me with naked eyes fringed with thick eyelashes. I had never noticed his eyes before. Those thick eyelashes made them look like two sweet cockroaches. He stared at me. And I did not know how

to react in the presence of a man. Evasively I gazed at the ceiling, the floor, the walls, and kept my hand outstretched because I did not know how to withdraw it. He looked at me gently, inquisitively, eyes bleary as if he had just woken up. Would he crush me with an unexpected hand? Or demand that I kneel and beg forgiveness? My thread of hope was that he might not know what I had done to him, just as I myself no longer knew, and, indeed, had never known.

– How did you get the idea of the hidden treasure?

– What treasure? I murmured sheepishly.

We stood there looking at each other in silence.

– Oh, the treasure! I blurted out, not really understanding, anxious to admit some fault, imploring him that my punishment should be simply to feel forever guilty, that eternal torture should be my punishment, anything but this unknown life.

– The treasure which is hidden where you least expect to find it. That is only waiting to be discovered. Who told you that?

The man has taken leave of his senses, I thought to myself, for what has all this got to do with the treasure? Stunned, unable to understand and passing from one surprise to another, I sensed, nevertheless, that I was on less dangerous ground. In our school races I had learned to carry on running after a fall, however serious, and I regained my composure at once: 'It was the composition about the treasure! So that was my mistake!' Feeling weak, and still treading carefully on this new and slippery reassurance, I had recovered sufficiently from my fall to be able to toss, in imitation of my former arrogance, this hair of mine which one day would have a permanent wave.

– Gosh, nobody..., I replied haltingly. I made it up myself, I said nervously, but already beginning to sparkle once more.

If I felt some relief at having something concrete to battle with at last, I was also aware of something much worse. The teacher's sudden lack of anger. Puzzled, I looked at him askance. And little by little, with deep suspicion. His lack of anger began to frighten me, it implied new threats which I could not fathom. His staring eyes refused to leave me – eyes devoid of anger... I was perturbed, and for no good reason I was losing my enemy and my support. I looked at him in surprise. What did he want from me? He made me feel uneasy. And those eyes without anger began to irk me more than the brutality which I had feared. A gentle fear, cold and moist, gripped me by degrees. Slowly, lest he should notice, I backed away until my shoulders touched the

wall, and then drew back my head until I could go no further. From the wall where I had embedded my entire body, I looked at him furtively.

And my stomach filled with waves of nausea. I cannot describe it.

A MISCHIEVOUS LITTLE GIRL (V)

Suddenly my heart was pounding with disillusionment. I could not bear it a minute longer – without taking the notebook, I ran out to the park, one hand over my mouth as if someone had smashed my teeth. With my hand over my mouth, horror-stricken, I ran and ran as if I would never stop. The fervent prayer is that which asks for nothing, the most fervent prayer is that which asks for nothing more. Terrified, I ran and ran.

Contaminated, I was relying on grown-ups for my redemption. The need to believe in my future goodness led me to venerate grown-ups whom I had made in my image, but an image of me cleansed at last by the penance of growing, delivered at last from the impure soul of a little girl. And now the teacher was destroying all this, he was destroying my love for him and for me. There could be no salvation for me: for that man was also me. My bitter idol who had ingenuously fallen into the snares of a confused and wilful child, and who had meekly allowed himself to be guided by my diabolical innocence... Pressing my hand to my mouth, I ran through the dust of the park.

When it finally dawned on me that I was well out of the teacher's reach, I came to an exhausted halt; close to collapsing, I leaned my full weight against a tree trunk, panting furiously. I stood there, gasping for breath with my eyes closed, swallowing the bitter dust from the tree trunk, my fingers mechanically stroking the rough grooves... forming a heart and arrow. Closing my eyes tightly, I let out a sudden moan, as I began to see things more clearly: was he trying to say that... that I was a hidden treasure? That treasure hidden where one least expects to find it... Oh, no, not at all, poor King of Creation, so much in need... of what? What was he in need of... that even I should have been turned into treasure?

I had enough strength to run even further. Forcing my dry throat to recover its breath, and angrily pushing against the tree trunk, I set off once more in the direction of the world's end.

But the shadowed edges of the park were still invisible and my steps were growing slower and slower from sheer exhaustion. I could go no further. Perhaps because I was so tired, I finally

gave up. My steps became slower and slower and the foliage of the trees swayed slowly. My steps became confused. Hesitantly, I came to a halt, the trees circled overhead. The strangest sweetness left my heart weary. I paused in fear. I was alone on the lawn, unsteady on my feet, and without any support. My hand over my weary breast like some virgin in an annunciation scene. Weary, lowering to that first sweetness a head that was submissive at last, and that from a distance might even suggest the head of a woman. The crest of the trees swayed to and fro. 'You're a very funny child, and a foolish little girl', he had said. It was almost like being in love.

No, I was not funny. Unconsciously, I was most serious. No, I was not a foolish little girl, reality was my destiny, and it was that part of me which offended others. And, by God, I was not a treasure. But if I had already discovered in myself all the vicious poison with which human beings are born and use to destroy life – only at that moment of honey and flowers did I discover how I would cure whoever loved me, whoever suffered on my account. I was dark ignorance with its hunger and laughter, with small deaths nourishing my inevitable life – what was I to do? I already knew that I was inevitable. But if I was worthless, I was all the man possessed at that moment. For once at least, he was being obliged to love, and without loving anyone – to love through someone. And I alone was there. Even if this were his sole advantage: having only me, and being forced to start by loving the wicked, he had started with something few achieve. It would be much too easy to desire the pure; the ugly was beyond love's reach; to love the impure was man's deepest longing. Through me, someone difficult to love, he had charitably received the substance of which we are made. Did I understand all this? No. Nor do I know what I understood at the time. But just as for one brief moment I had seen with horrified fascination the world in my teacher – and to this day I do not know what I saw, only that forever and in one brief moment I saw – and so understood both of us, even though I shall never know what I understood. I shall never know what I understand. Whatever I understood in the park was, to my pleasant surprise, understood by my ignorance. An ignorance which stood there – in the same numbed solitude as the surrounding trees – an ignorance which I fully recovered with its incomprehensible truth. There I stood, the girl who was too knowing by far, and behold how all that was unworthy in me served both God and

man. All that was unworthy about me was also my treasure.

Yes, just like a virgin in an annunciation scene. In allowing me to make him smile at last, the teacher had brought about this annunciation. He had just transformed me into something more than the King of Creation: he had made me the wife of the King of Creation. For suddenly it had fallen to me, armed with claws and dreams as I was, to pluck the barbed arrow from his heart. Suddenly it became clear why I had been born intransigent, why I had been born without aversion to pain. Why do you have such long nails? All the better to claw you to death and pluck out your fatal thorns, the wolf-man replies. Why do you have such cruel and hungry jaws? All the better to bite you with before blowing on the wound to ease the pain, my beloved. For alas, I must hurt you. I am the inevitable wolf and for this reason I was given life. Why do you have such fiery, menacing claws? So that we may go hand in hand, for my need is so great, so great, so great – the wolves howled, looking nervously at their own claws before snuggling up to one another to make love and sleep.

...Thus it came about that in the large park surrounding my school, I slowly began to learn how to be loved, while enduring the sacrifice of not being worthy, if only to lessen the pain of one who does not love. No, that was only one of the reasons. Others make up different stories. In some, other claws, filled with cruel love, have plucked the barbed arrow from my heart, indifferent to my screams of pain.

SILENT COMMUNICATION

What saves us from solitude is the solitude of others. Sometimes when two people are together, although they may be conversing, all they are silently sharing is the feeling of solitude.

REMINISCENCE OF A FOUNTAIN AND A CITY

When I lived in Berne, my house was in the Gerechtigkeitsgasse, a street named after Justice and leading to the Nydegg Church.

Looking from my window I could see the painted statue of a judge crowning the fountain, a set of scales in one hand and a raised sword in the other. He was surrounded by vanquished kings who appeared to be pleading for clemency. In winter the water froze in the tiny fountain and the statue itself looked as if it had been crystallized from ice. With the arrival of spring, red geraniums blossomed. Their petals would droop over the water and the red shadows of those balanced scales would be reflected in the water. Which of the two images was really the geranium? The distance was the same, the perspective was right, the silence unbroken. And the street was still medieval, since I was living in the old part of the city.

What helped to dispel the monotony of Berne was the sensation of living in the Middle Ages, waiting for the snow to disappear and for the reflection of red geraniums to reappear on the surface of the water. Besides, one of my sons was born there and it was in Berne that I wrote my least popular novel *A cidade sitiada* [The Besieged City], which people sometimes grow to like on second reading. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to that book. The sheer effort of writing it kept me occupied and helped me to ignore the eerie silence in the streets of Berne. No sooner had I finished the last chapter than I went into hospital to give birth to my son. Berne is an open city, so why did I feel so trapped and isolated? I used to go to the cinema every afternoon, no matter what film was being shown. And I can remember how I would often come out of the cinema to find that it had

started snowing. As dusk fell and I walked home alone in the medieval city, beneath a light flurry of snowflakes, I felt worse than a beggar-woman. For I had no idea what I should beg for.

FICTION OR NON-FICTION

I am moving into territory where I rarely venture because, strictly speaking, it belongs to the critics. None the less, I am always a little surprised when critics begin to question whether a certain novel is really fiction or non-fiction. Ironically enough, those who classify it as non-fiction then proceed to discuss the characters, to analyse the plot and dénouement, to examine the motivation and decide whether it is compatible with the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the book. What is fiction? In short, I think of fiction as the creation of human beings and situations which may never have existed, yet could so easily exist that they actually come to life. But any suggestions that novels should conform to a predetermined format – doesn't exactly bother me – but frankly *je m'en fiche*. I know that *A Paixão segundo G.H.* [The Passion according to G.H.] would conform more closely to the traditional concept of the novel if I were to make it more appealing by describing in detail those things which shape an existence, a romance, a character, etc. But the last thing I want is to shape anything. To make a book appealing is a perfectly legitimate manoeuvre. But I would rather write my novels with as few manoeuvres as possible. I myself prefer to read books with an appealing narrative because they are less demanding and require little or nothing of me in terms of close participation. But in order to write I am anxious to dispense with preconceptions: this is important for any writer.

Why should a book not be classified as fiction simply because it does not narrate a string of facts constituting a plot? Why should it not be considered fiction? It is not, after all, an autobiography or biography, and all the thoughts and emotions are linked to characters in the book who think and feel. And if I exercise my right to transform this or that material into elements of fiction, that is entirely my own affair. I agree that one could say of my novel what is often said about other people's lives: 'But what a life! Hardly worth calling a life!'

In novels, where the character's inner path is barely outlined, the novel is classified as a portrait of society or a tale of adventure

or whatever. So let us invent some new definition for the other type of novel by calling it: 'A novel of . . .' For in the final analysis, it is simply a question of definition.

One thing, however, is clear. *A paixão segundo G.H.* is unmistakably a novel.

THE IRONIC CORPSE

Could this be an epitaph for a witty friend who is now dead? Behind those spectacles of his there was a glimmer of kindness. Embedded in that breast, a diseased heart. This was his ironic revenge: his death was a problem for the living. I wonder where he has gone, since he did not believe in life after death? As if believing determined one's path. The void he has left behind is almost like an uncomfortable presence. And how amused he would have been, this paradox to have seen. 'You've even got it to rhyme!' he would say. Yes, even a rhyme can fight off tears. Where are the thoughts that were once his? Throbbing in other heads? No point in saying: my right arm for your life. This time without any rhyme, so that I may shed tears at long last. For a friend who would never have allowed tears.

DISCOVERY

A dog must smell like a dog. This bright idea occurred to a man recently in the midst of idle musing. This thought about the dog brought sudden inspiration and unexpectedly cleared his mind. The man was delighted – had he finally dotted all those i's? He was delighted and began to look at everything as if he were just recovering from a long illness. A dog must smell like a dog. This thought helped the man to accept himself entirely as he was, as if accepting that a man must smell of man and that a man's life is the one he lays bare. Walking along the street on his way to work, he passed a woman laden with shopping who appeared to ignore him. He smiled because she did not know that he knew that just as a dog is a dog, that woman was that woman. The man felt deeply moved when he reflected that he had just cleansed the world and that those fresh waters were still running. He was on his way to work at the Bank. And how he hated that horrible place. But washed with fresh waters, a bank is simply a bank.

Dear Mr X,

I have just come across your review of *A cidade sitiada* [The Besieged City], which may well have been published ages ago because the review is undated. Your conclusions are perceptive and clearly expressed. You have analysed my novel so thoroughly and unearthed so many crucial details which are close to my heart that for some considerable time I felt there was nothing more to be said. Only now do I see that there is more to be discovered in the book, but that is not your fault. Readers can only be expected to evaluate books in terms of what they find there. What alarms me – and this is surely my fault – is that any critic should fail to perceive the main objectives of my novel. Perhaps I have failed to make my intentions clear. Or has the critic been misled by other considerations which have nothing to do with me? Critics tend to go on, or at least they used to, about my *vocabulary* and *syntax*. As if these were purely verbal. Yet at no point in *A cidade sitiada* do I play with words. Every word in the book was essentially meant to say something. And I still think of my vocabulary as being naked. As for the book's *meaning*, I never suspected this would become obscured as the narrative developed. I can still sense that *meaning* throughout the entire book, a slender thread perhaps but nevertheless *intentional* and sustained from beginning to end. I believe that all the problems of Lucrécia Neves, the novel's main protagonist, are tied to this thread. So what was I trying to express through Lucrécia – this woman who is without the weapons of intelligence yet who aspires to that kind of spiritual integrity one associates with a horse, which does not *communicate* what it sees, which has no *verbal* or *mental vision* of things, which feels no need to complete an impression with its expression – the horse which is capable of this miracle whereby the impression is *total* and so *real* that any impression on the horse's part is already expression? I thought I had made it abundantly clear that Lucrécia Neves' real story was independent of her personal details. The struggle to achieve reality – that is the most important thing about this character who desperately tries to adhere to what exists by means of a total vision of things. I also tried to show how that vision – that way of seeing or point of view – can change reality even while creating it. A house is not only built with bricks and mortar, etc. Our way of looking at a man also

creates that man. Our way of seeing determines our perception of reality. When I say that Lucrécia Neves builds the city of São Geraldo and gives it a past, this somehow makes sense to me. When I describe those early stages in the city's foundation, when every gaze added something new, some fresh reality, this is so clear to me. For what is tradition or a city's cultural past other than a way of seeing things, which is then handed down to subsequent generations?

I thought I had merely given Lucrécia Neves the role of 'one of the people' who helped to build the city; allowing her that minimum of essential individuality every living being demands. Lucrécia Neves' personal problems, as you yourself recognize, are nothing more than the necessary terrain for this collective construction. Nothing could be clearer. One of the most passionate desires of the spirit is to be able to dominate external reality by spiritual means. Lucrécia finds she is incapable – and therefore *adheres* to that reality, and accepts as her own life the wider existence of the universe.

I fail to see how these threads, amongst others in the narrative, could have all been lost amidst what you describe as the book's 'verbal magic'. Ever since I published my first novel, critics have insisted on discussing my unusual phrasing. But believe me, what I was striving for – and have achieved, damn it – is to communicate through those phrases, and not simply to have invented phrases for their own sake.

To hear critics defining the painful process of matching words to emotions as 'purely verbal', fills me with horror. And it is further proof of the great divide between what one gives and what one receives... But I know what I have given and received. When San Tiago Dantas read *A cidade sitiada* for the first time, he was shocked. He told me to my face that my writing had deteriorated. Then one sleepless night he decided to read the novel a second time. Only to confide in tones of amazement: This is your best book. It is not my best book, but his words reassured me that he had come to understand Lucrécia Neves and the horses of São Geraldo. Dear Mr X, your review did not *bury* my novel: you also helped to *construct* it. But, if you'll pardon the expression, 'like one of the horses of São Geraldo'.

IMPROBABLE FUTURE

I shall go at some time. I shall go at some time or other, and this time I shall go alone, without my soul. I shall entrust my soul to my family and friends with some words of advice. It will not need much attention for it makes few demands. Sometimes it can be satisfied simply with newspapers. It can even be taken to the cinema if anyone happens to be going. I shall leave my soul behind. Perhaps entrust it to some animal. A refreshing change of scene as it looks through the window of some other soul, perhaps through the eyes of a cat or dog. Or better still, the eyes of a tiger. I shall be obliged to take my body with me. But I shall tell it beforehand: you are all the luggage I am taking. Follow me like a dog. And I shall walk in front, alone, blind at last to the world's mistakes, until I come across a shooting-star in mid-air which will burst me open. I am not seeking violence but some unknown force which nevertheless stirs amidst the tiniest grain of silence. At that moment all my blood will have been long since drained. Difficult to explain how, without a soul or spirit and already a corpse, I should still be so horribly astute. But two and two make four and that is no solution. It is a blind alley, a simple problem turned on its head. To get away from 'two and two make four' one has to turn back, to feign nostalgia, to find the spirit entrusted to one's friends and tell it: My word, you do look well! Having been thoroughly spoiled by those I love most dearly. My spirit, I am dying, I can sense it, sense it...

SATURDAY IS SPECIAL

Get down to work? Who is interested in work on this Saturday with its clear sky and fresh air? 'All those who ever achieved great things, achieved them to get out of some difficulty, to escape from a blind alley.' Must my entire life be devoted to writing, writing, writing? Like some deep spiritual exercise? And to merge with the light air of this Saturday on which I am writing? What am I trying to write? Today I want to write something relaxing and unpretentious, something such as the

reminiscence of a tall monument which seems all the taller because simply a reminiscence. But I want to have really touched that monument in passing. And now I must stop, because this is unmistakably Saturday!

THE UNCONTROLLABLE MACHINE

Man was programmed by God to resolve problems. But he soon began to create them instead of resolving them. Then the machine was programmed by man to resolve the problems he himself had created. Now the machine is starting to create problems which confuse and devour man. The machine keeps on getting bigger. It is enormous. To the point where man may cease to be a human organism. And only the machine will survive as the *perfect creation*. God has created a problem for Himself. He will end up destroying the machine and then start anew from man's ignorance when confronted by the apple. Or man will simply be the ancestor of the machine. Better the mystery of Paradise.

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE WORLD

I am an extremely busy person. I keep an eye on the world. Each morning I look down from my terrace at the strip of beach with the sea beyond. Sometimes the spray seems whiter and I can tell that the restless waters have advanced during the night leaving their mark on the sand. I watch the almond trees on the street below. Before falling asleep, and keeping an eye on the world in my dreams, I examine the night sky to see if there are stars twinkling against a blue background, because on certain nights the sky is not black but ultramarine. The world keeps me fully occupied, because I recognize that God is the cosmos, and that is a responsibility I would be prepared to forgo.

I see a little boy who cannot be more than ten, dressed in rags and unbelievably thin. A future case of tuberculosis, if he is not already infected.

When I visit the Botanical Gardens I soon become weary. There I have to keep an eye on thousands of plants and trees, especially the gigantic water-lilies.

Take note that I have said nothing about my emotional reactions: I spoke only of some of the thousands of things and people I keep an eye on. Nor does anyone pay me to do this job. I simply keep the world under observation.

Is it hard work keeping an eye on the world? Most certainly. I can remember the terrifying face of one woman I saw in the street, a face devoid of any expression. I also keep an eye on thousands of slum-dwellers on the nearby slopes. I observe the seasonal changes in myself: I inevitably change with every season.

You must be wondering why I keep an eye on the world. I was born with this mission. And I am responsible for everything in existence, even for those wars and crimes which cause so much physical and spiritual havoc. I am even responsible for this God Who is in a perpetual state of cosmic evolution towards greater perfection.

Since childhood I have kept an eye on a swarm of ants: they crawl in Indian file, carrying a tiny particle of leaf which does not prevent them from pausing to chat whenever they meet another procession of ants coming from the opposite direction.

I once read a standard textbook about bees and I have observed them ever since, especially the queen bee. Bees fly and nourish themselves on flowers: that much I have learned.

But ants have such a neat little waistline. Yet tiny as they are, they embrace a whole world, which eludes me unless I examine them closely: an instinctive sense of organization, a language which goes beyond the supersonic to our ears and probably attuned to instinctive feelings of love-cum-sentiment, for ants can speak. I kept a watchful eye on these insects when I was little and now that I so dearly long to see them again, I cannot find a single ant. I know they have not been exterminated otherwise I should have been told. Keeping an eye on the world also requires a lot of patience: I must wait for the ants to reappear. Patience. While watching the flowers open imperceptibly, little by little.

But I still have not found the person to whom I should report my findings.

THE PARTY

The imaginings which frighten me. I imagined a party – without food or drink – a party simply to be looked at. Even the chairs have been hired and transported to an empty third-floor apartment on the Rua da Alfândega, an ideal place for a party. I would invite all my former friends of both sexes, with whom I have now lost touch. Only former friends, excluding any of the mutual friends of friends. Individuals who shared my life and whose life I shared. But how could I climb those dark stairs to a rented room on my own? And how would I get back from the Rua da Alfândega at night? For I knew the pavements would be dry and hard.

I preferred another imagining. It began by mingling affection with gratitude and rage: only afterwards did the two wings of a bat unfold, like something coming from afar and getting closer; but those wings were also shining. Perhaps a tea-party this time – on a Sunday afternoon in the Rua do Lavradio – to which I would invite all the housemaids I had ever employed. Those whom I had forgotten would indicate their absence with an empty chair. just as they exist inside me. The others would be seated, their hands folded on their laps. Silent. Until each of them should open her mouth and, restored to life, a resuscitated corpse, should recite what I can remember of their conversation. Almost like a tea-party for society ladies, except that at this tea-party there would be no talk about housemaids.

– I wish you every happiness – one of them gets to her feet – May you be blessed with what no one can give you.

– Whenever I ask for anything – another rises from her chair – I can't stop laughing, so people never take me seriously.

– I like films with a gun fight. (And that was all I could remember about an entire person.)

– Plain, everyday home-cooking, madam. I only know how to cook for the poor.

– When I die, one or two people will miss me. But that's all.

– My eyes fill with tears when I speak to a lady, it must be all this spiritualism.

– He was such a pretty child that I really felt like giving him a good thrashing.

– Early this morning – the Italian maid told me – when I was coming to work, the leaves started falling along with the first snow. A man on the street said to me: 'It's raining gold and silver.' I pretended I hadn't heard him because, if I'm not careful, men always get their way with me.

– Here comes Her Ladyship – the oldest of all my former housemaids gets up, the one who only managed to show soured affection and who taught me so early in life how to forgive love's cruelty. – Did Your Ladyship sleep well? Being a lady means enjoying every luxury. She is full of whims: she wants this, she doesn't want that. To be a lady means being white.

– I want three days off during the Carnival, madam, for I'm tired of playing Cinderella.

– Food is a question of salt. Food is a question of salt. Food is a question of salt. Here comes Her Ladyship: may you be blessed with what no one can give you, that's all I ask when I die. Then the man said that the rain was gold, and no one can give you that. Unless you don't mind standing in the dark, bathed in gold, but it has to be in the dark. Her ladyship has seen better days: leaves or the first snow. To taste the salt in what you are eating, not to give a pretty child a good thrashing, to avoid laughter when you are asking for something, never to pretend that you haven't heard when someone says: It's raining, my good woman, it's raining gold and silver. It really is!

WRITING TO THE TUNE OF MY QUILL

This phrase keeps haunting me and I cannot even remember where it came from. For a start, no one writes with a quill nowadays. And besides, if one is using a typewriter, or whatever, there is no tune. No, no, I am not talking about trying to write well: that comes of its own accord. I am talking about trying to cope with that inner chaos which slowly condenses, takes form, and comes to the surface until that first word which gives it expression is born.

A VARIATION ON THE DISTRACTED MAN

He is wearing his spectacles all the time as he goes searching for them throughout the entire house. Now and then he says to himself with satisfaction: How fortunate I am to be able to see everything so clearly today. This should make it easier to find my spectacles. Sometimes, in the middle of searching, he begins to think to himself: I can see so well today that I might not need my spectacles for reading any more. He only realizes that he has been wearing his spectacles all the time when he adjusts them to read before going to sleep. He feels so bitterly disappointed: No wonder I thought I did not need my spectacles any more.

THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED

When all is said and done, we are already in the year 2000. We are so frightened of this landmark in time (Time revealed anew) that we precipitate its arrival. Just as we cannot bear the thought of something promised, and so, however painful, we hasten its coming so that any feelings of despair may pass at once. Not that the year 2000, which we have already entered, is one of despair. Or is it? Despair at the eternal existence of Time which, like the Universe, has always existed. Even as I speak, I can think without fear of the year 8000. Which is bound to come, like the year 2000. Time is not the duration of a life. The time

which elapsed before we were born is as eternal as the time which lies ahead of us. In the year 8000, if there are any people left, there will be a new religion, a religion prepared to concede that the immaterial can become material, a religion which has no fear of death, for this is entirely a personal matter.

YES AND NO

Yes, I am. No, I am not. I patiently wait for this contradiction to resolve itself. I shall be *me*, which also means *you*.

EVOLUTION

With the passing of time she got used to it, as if she were gradually becoming accustomed to the Earth, to the Moon, to the Sun and, strange to relate, especially to Mars. She was standing on a kind of platform, from where she could see for one fleeting instant the super-reality of what is truly real. More real than reality itself.

GENTLE WEEPING

...I caught a sudden glance and the man was so incredibly handsome and virile that I could feel the joy of creation. Not that I wanted him for myself, just as I do not crave the Moon at night when it becomes as delicate and impassive as a pearl. Just as I do not long for that nine-year old boy I saw chasing a ball and whose ringlets reminded me of the Archangel. All I wanted was to be a spectator. The man gave me a passing glance and smiled quietly: he knew he was handsome and clearly recognized that I did not want him for myself. He smiled at me because he did not feel threatened. (Exceptional human beings are more exposed to danger than ordinary people.) I crossed the street and hailed a taxi. The breeze ruffled my hair from behind and, although it was autumn, appeared to herald a new spring as if the tedious summer deserved the freshness of budding flowers. But for the moment it was autumn and the leaves were turning yellow on the almond-trees. I felt such joy that I snuggled apprehensively into a corner of the taxi because happiness, too,

can be painful. And all this had been provoked by the vision of a handsome man. I continued not to want him for myself, yet somehow he had given me a great deal with that friendly smile in token of our mutual understanding. The taxi was now approaching the viaduct near the Museum of Modern Art. I no longer felt happy. Autumn had become menacing and hostile. I felt like weeping gently.

THE ITALIAN WOMAN

Rosa lost her parents when she was small. Her brothers and sisters were dispersed throughout the world and she was sent to an orphanage attached to a convent. There she led an austere and deprived existence with the other inmates. During the winter the great mansion was permanently cold, and the work never ceased. Rosa did the washing, she swept out the rooms, and mended clothes. Meantime, the seasons passed. With her head shaved and wearing a long tunic made of coarse material, she often interrupted her sweeping to gaze out of the window. Autumn was the season she liked best, for she could savour it without going outdoors: through the window-panes she would watch the yellowing leaves fall into the courtyard, and that was autumn.

In this particular Swiss convent, whenever a man crossed the doorway, the floor had to be scrubbed and alcohol burned over the spot where he had been standing.

Then winter would return once more and Rosa's hands became inflamed and covered with chilblains. Her bed was so cold that it was impossible to sleep. In that darkened dormitory, with her open eyes peering over the sheet, she would espy those tiny glancing thoughts. In some strange way those thoughts were paradise.

How and why, at the age of twenty, Rosa suddenly decided to leave the convent, I cannot say, nor could she herself explain. But she had made up her mind, although everyone opposed the idea. Her resolve was firm, her resistance passive. The nuns were horrified and warned her that she would go to Hell. But because Rosa made no attempt to justify her decision, she got her way. She left the convent and found employment as a housemaid.

She left carrying her small bundle of possessions, her head shaved, her skirt down to her ankles.

'The world struck me as being...' but she could not explain.

With her Southern Italian features, her oval eyes, and curves which were slow in asserting themselves, Rosa went to live with a family which had been recommended. There she remained day and night, month after month, never going out. She explained

to me that at that time she did not know how 'to go out'. She contemplated the wonders of winter from the windows without venturing out into that Paradise: she observed everything through those windows and no one could say for certain whether she was happy or sad. Her face was still incapable of expressing emotion. She looked through those windows with the rapt attention of someone at prayer, her arms folded, her hands tucked into her sleeves.

One afternoon when everything struck her as being much too vast – a free afternoon without any household chores was almost sinful – she felt that she should apply herself to something, adopt a much more disciplined, even pious attitude. She went downstairs, went into the drawing-room and selected a book from the bookcase. She went back upstairs and sat bolt upright in a chair, for she was unaccustomed to seeking comfort and pleasure. She began to read with concentration. But her spherical head – where tufts of vigorous hair had begun to sprout – her head became muddled. She closed the book, lay down, and closed her eyes.

The family waited for her to serve dinner, but Rosa did not appear. They went to look for her. Her eyes were swollen, inflamed, expressionless: she was burning with fever. The mistress of the house spent that night looking after her, but there was nothing anyone could do: Rosa complained of nothing and asked for nothing as the fever gripped her. Next morning, she looked thinner, her eyes half-closed. And she passed another day and night in the same condition. The family sent for the doctor.

He enquired what had happened, for there were clear symptoms of a nervous disorder. Rosa made no reply, nor did it occur to her to answer the doctor's questions, for she was not accustomed to speaking up for herself. At this point, the doctor chanced to look at the bedside table and his eye caught sight of the book. He examined it, and looked at her with some alarm. The book was entitled *Le corset rouge*. He warned Rosa that she should not read such a book under any circumstances. She had barely left the convent, and her innocence constituted a threat. Rosa said nothing. The doctor continued:

– You must not read such books because they are false.

Rosa opened her eyes a little more widely for the first time. The doctor swore to her that the book was full of lies. He had sworn...

Rosa sighed and shyly gave a wistful smile:

– I thought that everything which was written and published in a book was the truth, she said, looking modestly at the first honest man she had ever known.

The doctor said – and one can imagine in what tone of voice:

– Nonsense.

Rosa slept, thin and pallid. Her fever abated and she was soon back on her feet. With time, people began to notice: what lovely black hair you have, they told her. Touching her hair, Rosa would reply: really!

How Rosa could be so happy at the age of forty continues to be a mystery. How she laughed. I know that on one occasion she tried to commit suicide. Not because she had left the convent. But because of a love affair. She explained that, when she fell in love, she had no idea that 'things were really like that'. Like what? She made no attempt to answer my question. Ten years older than her lover, she laughs under that great mane of black hair and insists: I really cannot explain why I prefer autumn to the other seasons. I think it's because in the autumn things wither so quickly.

She also insists: I'm not very bright. I have the impression that Madam is much more intelligent than I am. She also asks me: 'Has Madam ever cried like a fool without knowing why? for I have!' – and she bursts into laughter.

A MAN

His quite remarkable intelligence at first caused me embarrassment. I had to get used to the jargon of his daunting intellect. He is usually serious, but often wears a smile – no, no, I am not about to say that his smile lights up his entire face. But it is, in fact, the truth. He is not afraid of the commonplace, his so-called non-commitment is conveyed by his intelligent demeanour. He often indulges in sophistry, a subtle art which comes easily to the intelligent. I understand him, not with my mind which is no match for his, but with my whole being. Besides, he is a complete person. He never averts those intense dark eyes of his: he is not afraid to look into the eyes of other people. One feels tempted to smile with him. If only I knew how to. I really must get into the habit of smiling more often, otherwise people will think I am brooding over some *problem* and not simply looking serious and absorbed. But to come back to the man: when he says 'See you tomorrow', one knows tomorrow will arrive. The *objets d'art* he tends to buy are ever so slightly kitsch. This fills me with affection. He is unaware that I watch him so closely, not *all that often*, but *so closely*.

AN UNTRANSLATED EPIGRAPH

As an epigraph for my novel *A Paixão segundo G.H.* [The Passion according to G.H.] I chose, or rather, miraculously came across, after finishing the book, a quotation from the art historian Bernard Berenson. Even though it had little to do with my novel, I could not resist using the phrase.

But in my enthusiasm, I made one mistake. I made no attempt to translate the epigraph but left it in English, forgetting that the Brazilian reader is not obliged to understand another language. It would be difficult, however, to capture the beauty and perfection of Berenson's own words in any other language:

> A complete life may be one ending in
> so full an identification with the non-self
> that there is no self to die.

OLD-FASHIONED TASTES

Not so long ago I experienced an anguished sense of loss. Without giving the matter much thought, I made a sudden decision and told my hairdresser Luís Carlos to crop my hair. As he began cutting and locks of hair fell limply on to the floor, I looked in the mirror only to be confronted by an expression of alarm at my own rashness. And I experienced a sudden feeling of loss. Why loss? This feeling is so ancient that it recedes through the depths of time to a prehistoric age. A woman never cuts her hair because her femininity resides in those long tresses. Besides, when my boys were children they used to enjoy playing with my long hair. And recently when I visited a friend, her little girl who is five took great delight in endlessly combing my hair. There was something nice about the way those tiny hands communicated a sense of satisfaction. But now I had to accept having cropped hair and I promised myself that I would let it grow again. No sooner was I back home than I changed my mind. Long hair takes a long time to dry, it needs a lot of brushing and frequent visits to the hairdresser, where one has to endure the sheer torture of sitting underneath one of those absurd hair-

dryers. Short hair, on the other hand, I can wash myself, then sit in the sun for a while and that is that. As I sat there daydreaming, I thought to myself: Have I lost my strength like Samson? Well, perhaps not my strength as such, but my power as a woman.

VIETCONG

One of my little boys asks me: 'Why do you sometimes write about personal things?' I explained that in the first place I have never really touched on personal matters, for by nature I am a very private sort of person. And even with close friends, I only go so far. It is inevitable when one is writing a weekly column for a newspaper that the writer should comment, however reluctantly, on the repercussions of everyday events and on the strange nature of our existence. I recently discussed this problem with a well-known journalist, lamenting the fact that I felt I was becoming much too *personal* in my articles when I had managed to avoid any such intimacy in all eleven of the books I have published to date. He assured me that when writing a column there is no escape. My little son then asked me: 'Why don't you write about Vietnam?' I felt very small and humble and thought to myself: What can a feeble woman like me say about so many deaths bereft of any glory, about wars in which young soldiers lose their lives, not to mention the endless massacre, and to achieve what in the end? We know only too well what lies behind all that destruction and it is terrifying. I told my son that I left any such commentaries to writers like Antônio Callado. But I suddenly felt helpless and down-hearted. All I could do about the Vietnam War was to lament so much bloodshed and express my utter bewilderment. And that is as much as most of us can hope to do: to express our disgust and remorse in the face of our helplessness. The war in Vietnam is truly shameful.

SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

I have struggled all my life to cure this tendency to daydream, lest it should carry me into remote waters. But the effort of swimming against this gentle current takes away some of my vital strength. And if, in fighting off daydreams, I gain in terms of action, I inwardly lose something very precious which can never be replaced. But one of these days I shall have to go, without worrying where I might end up.

THE MAKING OF A NOVEL

I can no longer recall where it began but I know I did not start at the beginning. It was, in a manner of speaking, all written simultaneously. Everything was there, or appeared to be there, as if within the temporal space of an open piano with its simultaneous keys.

I wrote with the utmost care as the narrative began to take shape inside me, and only after the fifth version had been patiently drafted did I become fully aware of the text. Only then did I begin to understand more clearly what was waiting to be expressed.

My great fear was that, out of impatience with my slowness in understanding myself, I might arrive at some meaning with undue haste. I had the impression, or rather felt certain that the more time I gave myself, the more spontaneously would the narrative begin to surface.

Increasingly I find that it is all a matter of patience, of love begetting patience, of patience begetting love.

The book came together simultaneously as it were, emerging more here than there, or suddenly more there than here: I would interrupt a sentence in Chapter Ten, let us say, in order to write Chapter Two, which I would then abandon for months on end while I wrote Chapter Eighteen. I showed endless patience: putting up with the considerable inconvenience of disorder without any reassurance that I would finish the book. But then order, too, can bring a sense of disquiet.

As always, the greatest difficulty is waiting. (I'm feeling rather odd, a woman will tell her doctor. You're going to have a baby. And here was me thinking I was dying, the woman replies.) My deformed soul growing and swelling, while I remain uncertain whether something is about to come to light.

In addition to this tiresome waiting, it requires infinite patience to reconstitute in gradual stages that initial vision which came in a flash. Recovering that vision is extremely difficult.

And to make matters worse, I am quite hopeless when it comes to editing. I am incapable of narrating an idea, and do not know how to 'embellish an idea with words'. What I write does not refer to past thought, but to thought in the present: whatever

comes to the surface is already expressed in the only possible words, or simply does not exist.

As I write them down, I am convinced once more that, however paradoxical it may sound, the greatest drawback about writing is that one has to use words. It is a problem. For I should prefer a more direct form of communication, that tacit understanding one often finds between people. If I could write by carving on wood or by stroking a child's head or strolling in the countryside, I would never resort to using words. I would do what so many people do who are not writers, and with the same joy and torment as those who write, and with the same bitter disappointments which are beyond consolation. I would live and no longer use words. And this might be the solution. And as such, be most welcome.

WRITING

Writing for a newspaper is not so demanding: it is light, it must be light, even superficial. Those who read newspapers have neither the will nor time to read in depth.

But to write something intended for a book often demands more strength than one seems to possess.

Especially if it means devising one's own writing habits, as in my case. When I consciously decided in my early teens that I wanted to become a writer, I immediately found myself in a void. And there was no one to help or advise me.

I had to emerge from that void, to try and understand myself, and to forge, as it were, my own truth. I made a start, but not even at the beginning. The sheets of paper began piling up – nothing I wrote seemed to make sense, my frustration as I struggled to write something worthwhile became one more obstacle in the path of success. What a pity I destroyed the interminable narrative I then started writing under the influence of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. I tore it up, contemptuous of my almost superhuman efforts to master the craft of writing and come to terms with myself. And no one knew my secret. I did not tell a soul. I lived through that sorrow alone. One thing, however, did occur to me. It was important to carry on writing without waiting for the right moment, because the right moment never comes. Writing has never been easy for me. I knew from the outset this was my vocation. Having a vocation is not the same as having talent. One can have a vocation and no talent – in other words, feel compelled to write without knowing where to start.

INSPIRATION

Ample bosom, broad hips, eyes chaste, brown, and dreamy. Now and then she would cry out suddenly. Speaking so quickly that she could scarcely be heard, she confided cheerfully with an air of impatience:

'I thought that I could never be a writer, I have so... so... little to say.'

One day, however, as if hidden from herself, she had an idea and jotted down some sentences about the beauty of the Sugar Loaf Mountain in her notebook. Just a few words, for she was so concise. Time passed and one evening when she was alone she remembered that she had made a few notes about something or other – the Sugar Loaf Mountain? The sea? She went to look for her notebook. She searched the entire house. She systematically went through every drawer and cupboard. She even opened shoe-boxes in the hope of having been so secretive as to have hidden her notes in a shoe-box. What a good idea. Gradually the sensation of choking grew worse. She ran her hand over her forehead – now she was searching for something more than her notebook, she was searching for what inspiration had dictated. Let us see, let us be patient and have another look. What could she have written in her notebook? She remembered it was something very spiritual about something very picturesque. For her there was nothing like the picturesque. Let's have another look. It's a question of willpower, of getting hold of it somehow. What a calamity – she said, standing motionless in the middle of the room, not knowing where to turn, where to look. What a calamity. The room, tranquil in the evening light. And somewhere there was something written, some intimate thought, of that she was certain. She unbuttoned the collar of her blouse. Don't be down-hearted, she whispered to herself, look amongst your papers, amongst your letters, amongst the cuttings and reviews people keep sending you. Ah, she reasoned illogically, if only they had written to her more often, then she would have more papers to search through. But her orderly life was exposed, she had few places for hiding things, her existence was tidy. Her only hiding place was herself, her own soul which she had once

bared in her notebook. But how happy she felt to have pieces of furniture and boxes where she might discover things by chance. She had places where she could go on searching indefinitely.

Now and then she would make another search. From time to time, she would remember her notebook and be seized with fresh hope. Until one day, after several more years had passed, she remarked modestly:

– When I was younger, I used to do a little writing.

THE LITTLE BOY

– Mummy, I saw a baby hurricane, but so small and feeble that all it could do was to send three tiny leaves swirling gently round on the pavement.

WHEN THE HOUR OF PARTING COMES

– You do understand, don't you Mummy, that I can't love you like this for ever and ever?

LONG LIVE TODAY

...without any encouragement or expectation here I am in mid-afternoon applying myself to lettering like any school-child. And like the nun in her parlour, busy as a bee, I embroider the words in gold thread. *Long Live Today*.

THE WONDERS OF EACH WORLD

I have a friend called Azaléia who simply enjoys life. Life without any adjectives. She is physically ill, but always cheerful and full of fun. Her existence is difficult, but it is hers.

One day she explained to me that everyone can count on seven wonders in life. What are they? That depended on the person.

She then listed the seven wonders in her own world.

First: to have been born. To have been born is a gift, to exist, say I, is a miracle.

Second: her five senses which largely include the sixth. With her senses she can touch and feel and hear and communicate and experience pleasure and sorrow.

Third: her capacity for love. This capacity, which is much less common than people assume, fills her with love for the few and the many, and causes her breast to swell.

Fourth: her intuition. Intuition can go beyond reasoning and discover things the senses do not perceive.

Fifth: her intelligence. She considers herself privileged to be able to understand. Her powers of reasoning are sharp and persuasive.

Sixth: harmony. She has struggled to achieve this and now finds herself in total harmony with the world in general, and with her own inner world.

Seventh: death. She believes, theosophically, that after death the soul takes root in another body, and life begins all over again and in blissful possession of these seven restored wonders.

IDLE CONVERSATION

I was having a cup of coffee in the kitchen when I heard the maid through in the scullery humming the loveliest melody. A melody without words, a sort of cantilena and full of harmony. I asked her who had written the music. She told me: Nobody, it's just a silly tune I made up myself.

She did not know she was creative. Just as the world does not know it is creative. I stopped drinking my coffee and began

speculating: will the world become even more creative? The world is unaware of itself. We are so backward in relation to ourselves. Even the word *creative* will no longer be used or even mentioned: things will simply be created. We are not to blame – I went back to my coffee – if we are thousands of years behind. To think of 'thousands of years hence' almost made me dizzy, for I cannot even be sure what colour the earth will be. Posterity exists and will eliminate our present. And if the world recreates itself in cycles, let us say, are we likely to revert to the Stone Age so that everything may repeat itself all over again? It wounds me almost physically to think that I shall never know what this world will be like thousands of years hence. On the other hand, I continued to reflect, we may be crawling but we crawl in haste. And the tune the maid was humming will dominate this new world: for people can be creative without even knowing it. Meanwhile, we are as parched as a dried fig which has scarcely any moisture left.

Meanwhile the maid is hanging out the washing on the clothes-line, still humming that tune without words. The melody pervades me. The maid is dark and skinny, and lodged inside her is an 'I'. A body separate from other bodies, and that is called an 'I'? It is strange to have a body in which to lodge, a body where liquefied blood flows incessantly, where the mouth can sing, and the eyes must have wept so often. She is an 'I'.

FEAR OF ETERNITY

I shall never forget my dramatic and harrowing contact with eternity.

As a little girl I had never chewed bubble-gum and in Recife it was not easy to find. I simply had no idea what bubble-gum looked like. My pocket-money was meagre and for the price of bubble-gum I could have bought lots of sweets.

My sister managed to save up enough money to buy some. On our way to school, she gave me a piece and warned me: Be careful not to lose it, because you can chew it forever. Bubble-gum lasts for ages.

– What do you mean, it lasts for ages? I stopped in my tracks, completely bewildered.

– It lasts forever and that's that.

I was easily impressed and felt as if I had been transported to a never-never land inhabited by princes and good fairies. I grabbed that small pink object which promised eternal pleasure and carefully examined it, suspicious of its miraculous powers. Like most children, I would sometimes take a boiled sweet out of my mouth after the first few sucks, to keep it for later. And here I was in possession of this pink object, so innocent in appearance yet capable of realizing this impossible world of which I had just been made aware.

With the utmost delicacy, I finally popped the bubble-gum into my mouth.

– And now what am I supposed to do? – I asked my sister, for fear of spoiling whatever ritual might be expected of me.

– Suck the bubble-gum until you begin to taste the sweetness and then you can start chewing. And after that you can go on chewing for as long as you like. Unless you happen to lose it. I've lost mine several times.

Lose eternity? Never.

The bubble-gum had a nice enough taste but nothing out of the ordinary. And I was still puzzled as we made our way to school.

– It doesn't taste sweet any more. Now what?

– Now you carry on chewing.

For some strange reason I felt nervous. I began chewing and that rubbery gum in my mouth had now turned grey and tasted of nothing. I chewed and chewed but felt sadly disappointed. It would have been a lie to say I was enjoying that bubble-gum. And the fact that it lasted forever filled me with fear, the kind of fear one experiences when confronted with the idea of eternity or the infinite.

I was reluctant to admit that I was not up to eternity. The very idea distressed me. But meanwhile, I obediently carried on chewing without stopping.

Until I could stand it no longer and as I went through the school gates I managed to let it drop on to the ground.

– Oh, look what's happened! – I said, feigning alarm and disappointment. Now I can't chew it any more. I've lost my bubble-gum!

– How many times do I have to tell you! my sister rebuked me – bubble-gum lasts forever. Unless you're silly enough to lose it. You can even chew it in bed at night, and then stick it on the head-board before you fall asleep. Never mind, one day I'll give you another piece if you promise not to lose it next time.

My sister's generosity filled me with remorse. And I began to regret that I had lied to her by insisting the bubble-gum had dropped by accident. But I felt so relieved. No longer burdened by the weight of eternity.

RAMBLING THOUGHTS

After much sporadic and puzzled musing about the universe, I came to several obvious conclusions (the obvious is very important because it guarantees a certain truthfulness). In the first place, I concluded that the infinite exists. In other words, the infinite is not a mathematical abstraction, but something which truly exists. We are so far from understanding the world that our mind cannot reason except on the basis of finites. Then it occurred to me that if the universe is finite, I might end up with another problem on my hands, namely, what comes after the finite? Then I reached the modest conclusion, purely personal, that God is the infinite. During these ramblings of mine, I began to realize just how little I know and this consoled me: the consolation of hope. Let me explain: the little I know is not enough to understand life, so the explanation lies in what I do not know and in what I hope to come to know a little better.

The beauty of the infinite is that there are no adjectives to describe it. The infinite simply exists. We connect with the infinite by means of our unconscious. Our unconscious is infinite.

The infinite is not overwhelming because when speaking of the infinite one cannot use words such as *greatness* or *incommensurability*. All one can do is to adhere to the infinite. I know about the absolute because I exist and I am relative. My ignorance is, in fact, my hope: I am hopeless when it comes to using adjectives. Which is reassuring. Because adjectivization is a quality, while the unconscious, like the infinite, has neither quality nor quantity. I inhale the infinite. Looking up at the sky, I become inebriated with my own existence.

The beauty of the absolute defies description and is beyond our imagination. We inhale that beauty. The feeling of beauty is our link with the infinite. It is the means by which we can adhere to it. There are moments, however rare, when the existence of the infinite is so obvious that we experience vertigo. The infinite is a *coming-into-being*. It is ever actual and cannot be divided by time. The infinite is time. Space and time are one and the same thing. What a pity I do not have a sufficient grasp of physics and mathematics to be able to think more clearly

instead of rambling, to be able to find the right words to communicate my feelings.

Our mental fertility is astonishing. For centuries man has divided time into the seasons of the year. He has even tried to divide the infinite into days, months and years because the infinite can be inhibiting and torture the soul. And faced with anguish, we carry the infinite within the ambit of our awareness and organize it into a simplified human form. Without this or some other form of organization, our consciousness could be exposed to a vertigo bordering on madness. At the same time, the eternal infinite is a source of pleasure for the human mind. Without understanding, we comprehend ourselves. And without understanding, we live. Our life is only one aspect of the infinite. Or to put it another way: the infinite has no aspects. Which is the most convenient form in which the conscious mind can embrace the infinite? For as we have already stated, the unconscious person accommodates the infinite for the simple reason that he or she is also infinite. Would we have a better understanding of the infinite if we were to draw a circle? Surely not. For the circle has perfect form but belongs to the mind and is restricted by its own nature. For even the circle would make a poor description of the infinite. One of our natural mistakes is to believe that the infinite stems from ourselves. We are unable to think of *I exist* without taking *ourselves* as the point of view or departure.

I must confess I have lost the thread of this argument. Never mind, I have better things to do than waste my time writing nonsense about the infinite. Besides, it is time for lunch and the maid has just announced that the food is on the table. Just as well, because it really was time to call a halt.

CREATING BRASÍLIA

Brasília is built on the line of the horizon. – Brasília is artificial. As artificial as the world must have been when it was created. When the world was created, it was necessary to create a human being especially for that world. We are all deformed through adapting to God's freedom. We cannot say how we might have turned out if we had been created first, and the world deformed afterwards to meet our needs. Brasília has no inhabitants as yet who are typical of Brasília. – If I were to say that Brasília is pleasant, you would realize immediately that I like the city. But if I were to say that Brasília is the image of my insomnia, you would see this as a criticism: but my insomnia is neither pleasant nor awful – my insomnia is me, it is lived, it is my terror. The two architects who planned Brasília were not interested in creating something beautiful. That would be too simple; they created their own terror, and left that terror unexplained. Creation is not an understanding, it is a new mystery. – When I died, I opened my eyes one day and there was Brasília. I found myself alone in the world. There was a taxi standing there. No sign of the driver. – Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer are two solitary men. – I look at Brasília the way I look at Rome: Brasília began with the starkest of ruins. The ivy had not yet grown. – Besides the wind there is another thing that blows. It can only be recognized in the supernatural rippling of the lake. – Wherever you stand, you have the impression of being on the edge of a dangerous precipice. Brasília stands on the margin. – Were I to live here, I should let my hair grow down to my feet. – Brasília belongs to a glorious past which no longer exists. That type of civilization disappeared thousands of years ago. In the 4th century BC, Brasília was inhabited by men and women who were fair and very tall, who were neither American nor Scandinavian, and who shone brightly in the sun. They were all blind. That explains why there is nothing to collide with in Brasília. The inhabitants of Brasília used to dress in white gold. The race became extinct because few children were born. The more beautiful the natives of Brasília, the blinder, purer, and more radiant they became, and the fewer children they produced. The natives

of Brasília lived for nearly three hundred years. There was no one in whose name they could die. Thousands of years later, the location was discovered by a band of fugitives who would not be accepted in any other place; they had nothing to lose. There they lit a bonfire, set up their tents, and gradually began excavating the sands which buried the city. Those men and women were short and dark-skinned, with shifty, restless eyes, and because they were fugitives and desperate, they had something to live and die for. They occupied the houses, which were in ruins, and multiplied, thus forming a human race which was much given to contemplation. – I waited for night, like someone waiting for shadows in order to steal away unobserved. When night came, I perceived with horror that it was hopeless: wherever I went, I would be seen. The thought terrified me: seen by whom? – The city was built without any escape route for rats. A whole part of myself, the worst part, and precisely that part of me which has a horror of rats, has not been provided for in Brasília. Its founders tried to ignore the importance of human beings. The dimensions of the city's buildings were calculated for the heavens. Hell has a better understanding of me. But the rats, all of them enormous, are invading the city. That is a newspaper headline. – This place frightens me. – The construction of Brasília: that of a totalitarian state. This great visual silence which I adore. Even my insomnia might have created this peace of never-never-land. Like those two hermits, Costa and Niemeyer, I would also meditate in the desert where there are no opportunities for temptation. But I see black vultures flying high overhead. What is perishing, dear God? – I did not shed a single tear in Brasília. – There was no place for tears. – It is a shore without any sea. In Brasília there is no place where one may enter, no place where one may leave. – Mummy, it's nice to see you standing there with your white cape fluttering in the breeze. (The truth is that I have perished, my son.) – A prison in the open air. In any case, there would be nowhere to escape to. For anyone escaping would probably find himself heading for Brasília. They captured me in freedom. But freedom is simply what one achieves. When they beat me, they are ordering me to be free. – The human indifference which lurks in my nature is something I discover here in Brasíia, and it flowers cold and potent, the frozen strength of Nature. Here is the place where my crimes (not the worst of them, but those I would not understand), where my crimes would not be crimes of love. I am off

to commit those other crimes which God and I understand. But I know that I shall return. I am drawn here by all that is terrifying in my nature. – I have never seen anything like it in the world. But I recognize this city in the depths of my dream. In those depths there is lucidity. – For as I was saying, Flash Gordon... – If they were to photograph me standing in Brasília, when they came to develop the film only the landscape would appear. – Where are the giraffes of Brasília? – A certain twitching on my part, certain moments of silence, cause my son to exclaim: 'Really, grown-ups are the limit!' – It is urgent. Were Brasília not populated, or rather, over-populated, it would be inhabited in some other way. And should that happen, it would be much too late: there would be no place for people. They would sense they were being quietly expelled. – Here the soul casts no shadow on the ground. – During the first two days I had no appetite. Everything had the appearance of the food they serve on board aeroplanes. – At night, I confronted silence. I know that there is a secret hour when manna falls and moistens the lands of Brasília. – However close one may be, everything here is seen from afar. I could find no way of touching. But at least there is one thing in my favour: before arriving here, I already knew how to touch things from afar. I never became too desperate: from afar, I was able to touch things. I possessed a great deal, and not even what I have touched knows of this. A rich woman is like this. It is pure Brasília. – The city of Brasília is situated outside the city. – '*Boys, boys come here, will you. Look who's coming on the street, all dressed up in modernistic style. It ain't nobody but...*' (*Aunt Hagar's Blues*, played by Ted Lewis and his Band, with Jimmy Dorsey on the clarinet.) – Such astonishing beauty, this city traced out in mid-air. – Meantime, no samba is likely to be born in Brasília. – Brasília does not permit me to feel weary. It almost hounds me. I feel fine. I feel fine. I feel fine. I feel just fine. Besides, I have always cultivated my weariness as my most precious passiveness. – All this is but today. Only God knows what will happen to Brasília. Here the fortuitous takes one by surprise – Brasília is haunted. It is the motionless outline of something. – Unable to sleep, I look out of my hotel window at three o'clock in the morning. Brasília is a landscape of insomnia. It never sleeps. – Here the organic being does not deteriorate. It becomes petrified. – I should like to see five hundred eagles of the blackest onyx scattered throughout Brasília. – Brasília is asexual. – The first instant you set eyes on

the city you feel inebriated: your feet do not touch the ground. – How deeply one breathes in Brasília. As you breathe here you begin to experience desire. And that is out of the question. Desire does not exist here. Will it ever exist? I cannot see how. – It would not surprise me to encounter Arabs on the street. Arabs of another age and long since dead. – Here my passion dies. And I gain a lucidity which makes me feel grandiose for no good reason. I am wonderful and futile, I am of the purest gold. And almost endowed with the spiritualistic powers of a medium. – If there is some crime which humanity has still to commit, that new crime will be initiated here. It is so very open, so well suited to the plateau, that no one will ever know. – This is the place where space most closely resembles time. – I am certain that this is the right place for me. But I have become much too corrupted on earth. I have acquired all of life's bad habits. – Erosion will strip Brasília to the bone. – The religious atmosphere which I sensed from the outset, and denied. This city was achieved through prayer. Two men beatified by solitude created me here, on foot, restless, exposed to the wind. How I should love to set white horses free here in Brasília. At night, they would become green under the light of the moon – I know what those two men wanted: that slowness and silence which are also my idea of eternity. Those two men created the image of an eternal city. – There is something here which frightens me. When I discover what it is, I shall also discover what I like about this place. Fear has always guided me to the things I love; and because I love, I become afraid. It was often fear which took me by the hand and led me. Fear leads me to danger. And everything I love has an element of risk. – In Brasília you find the craters of the Moon. – And the beauty of Brasília is to be found in those invisible statues.

IRRESISTIBLE INCARNATION

Sometimes when I see someone whom I have never seen before, and I observe that person at length, I begin to identify with her and take steps to get to know that person. And this intrusion into another person's life, no matter who she may be, never ends in self-accusation. Once I have identified with the other woman, I understand her motives and forgive her. Needless to say, I have to be careful not to be drawn into some dangerous or glamorous existence which might dissuade me from reverting to being myself.

One day on a plane... Oh, dear God, I implored, I beg of You, anything but *that*; I have no desire to be a missionary!

But it was hopeless. I knew that after having to spend three hours in her presence, I would become a missionary myself for several days. The missionary's austerity and polite gestures had already taken possession of me. And it is always with a certain curiosity, a sense of wonder and weariness that I finally succumb to the life I am about to experience for several days. There is also some apprehension from a practical point of view: I am much too preoccupied with my work and leisure to be able to cope with the additional burden of some strange new existence whose evangelical zeal is already weighing upon me. In the plane itself I noticed that I had already started imitating the solemn movements of the lay missionary: then I began to understand her patience, that self-effacing gait, her feet scarcely touching the ground, as if to tread more firmly would disturb the other passengers. I, too, had turned pale, my lips unpainted, my expression meek, and wearing the unmistakable head-dress of a lay missionary.

When the plane touches down, I thought to myself, I shall probably wear that expression of suffering-overcome-by-the-peace-of-having-a-mission. And on my face will be imprinted the sweetness of moral hope. Because I have suddenly become extremely moral. Yet when I boarded the plane I was so wholesomely amoral. I was, no, I am! I cried out in protest against the missionary's prejudices. It was useless: all my energy was being sapped so that I might become delicate. I pretended to be reading

a magazine, while she read her Bible.

We were about to make a short landing. The air-steward distributed boiled sweets. And the missionary blushed the moment the young steward approached.

Back on the ground, I was a missionary waiting in a windy airport. I kept a firm grip on the long skirt of that imaginary habit for fear of that threatening wind. I understand, I thought, oh I understand so well how lost she must be feeling during these hours when she is not fulfilling her mission. Like the little missionary, I, too, disapproved of those short skirts worn by the other women passengers, which could only be tempting to men. And when I did not understand, it was with the same purified fanaticism of this pale woman who blushed the moment the young air-steward returned to announce the plane was ready to leave.

I knew that it would be some time before I could hope to regain my own identity. Which perhaps was never really mine apart from the moment I was born, only to be followed by one reincarnation after the other. But no: I am a person. And when my own ghost takes possession of me, the encounter is one of such bliss and rejoicing that in a manner of speaking we weep on each other's shoulder. Then, wiping away our tears of joy, my ghost fully embodies itself with me and we go out into the world with our head held high.

Once, on another trip, I came across a prostitute reeking of cheap perfume who smoked with her eyes half-closed while staring at a male passenger who was soon hypnotized. I began imitating her to see what would happen. I lit a cigarette and with half-closed eyes began staring at the only man nearby. But the fat man I had chosen in my efforts to identify with the prostitute, was far too engrossed in the *New York Times*. Besides, my perfume was much too discreet. A complete fiasco.

SATURDAY

I find Saturday is the rose of the week; on Saturday afternoon curtains blow in the breeze, and someone empties a bucket of water over the terrace. Saturday with a breeze blowing is the rose of the week. Saturday morning I associated with the yard, the bee flying from plant to plant, and the breeze: a bee-sting, a swollen face, blood and honey, the bee has left its mark. Other bees will follow the scent and on the following Saturday morning I shall see if the yard is full of bees. It was on a Saturday that the ants swarmed over paving-stones in the backyards of my childhood. It was on a Saturday that I saw a man sitting in the shade on the pavement, eating stew and manioc meal out of a gourd. It was Saturday afternoon and we had already bathed in the sea. At two o'clock, a bell announced in the breeze the matinée performance at the local cinema: Saturday with a breeze was the rose of the week. If it rained, I alone knew that it was Saturday; Saturday transformed into a drenched rose? In Rio de Janeiro, just when you think the exhausted week is about to die, the week suddenly opens out into a rose. On the Avenida Atlantica a car slams on its brakes and, suddenly, before the startled breeze can blow once more, I sense it is Saturday afternoon. It has been Saturday, but is no longer the same. I say nothing, seemingly resigned. But I have already gathered my things and moved on to Sunday morning. Sunday morning is also the rose of the week. Although not to be compared with Saturday. I shall never know why.

A HUNDRED YEARS' PARDON

Those who have never stolen would not understand. And those who have never stolen roses would never be capable of understanding me. For when I was a little girl, I used to steal roses.

In Recife there were lots of streets with large villas on either side, surrounded by extensive gardens, where rich people lived. I used to play a game with another little girl in order to decide who owned those villas. 'That white one is mine.' 'No, it isn't, we've already agreed the white ones are mine.' But that one isn't all white for the windows are green. Sometimes we would stand there for ages, our faces pressed against the railings as we peered in.

The stealing began as follows. We were playing this game of ours one day when we stopped in front of a villa which looked like a little castle. At the far end there was an enormous orchard. And in front of the villa there were neat flower-beds full of flowers.

And all alone in the middle of one of the beds there was a bright pink rose which had just started to open. I stood there gaping, lost in admiration for that proud rose which was not yet in full bloom. And then suddenly it happened: I wanted that rose with all my heart. I wanted it, just for me, oh, how I wanted it. And there was no way of getting it. Had the gardener been there I should have asked him for the rose, although most likely he would have chased us away as if we were street-urchins. But there was no gardener around, not a soul to be seen. And to keep out the sun, the blinds were drawn. No trams passed along this street and there were few cars. In the midst of my silence and that of the rose, there was my desire to possess it just for myself. I wanted to touch it. I wanted to smell it until I became intoxicated by its perfume.

Until I could bear it no longer. Overcome with desire, I lost no time in drawing up a plan. And determined to succeed, I gave clear instructions to my little friend and carefully explained the part she was to play. She would keep an eye on the windows and watch out for the gardener, who might suddenly appear, or for any passers-by. Meanwhile, I slowly eased open the gates which were rather rusty, fully expecting them to creak a little. I eased them open just enough for my skinny frame to squeeze

through. And then, moving quickly, I tiptoed over the paving-stones between the flower-beds. My heart was beating fast and it seemed to take forever to reach that rose.

At last, the rose was within reach. I paused for a second, perilously, because close up, it looked even lovelier. Reaching out to break the stem, I scratched my hand on the thorns and licked the blood from my fingers.

Then suddenly – I held that entire rose in my hand. I crept back to the gate as quietly as possible and I slipped through the gate which I had left ajar, clutching my prize. And then the rose and I, both of us deathly pale, took to our heels and ran away from the villa as fast as my legs could carry us.

What did I do with my rose? Now that it was mine, this is what I did:

I took it home and put it in a glass of water where it triumphed in all its beauty, the petals thick and velvety in various shades of pink. The colour deepened in the middle until it turned almost crimson.

It was such a wonderful feeling.

That rose gave me so much pleasure that I simply began stealing more and more roses. The ritual never varied: the other little girl kept a lookout while I went in, snapped the roses from their stems and made my escape. With my heart beating fast and forever with that sense of triumph no one could take from me.

I also stole cherries. There was a Presbyterian church near my home. The grounds were enclosed by a green hedge, which was so tall and dense that it was impossible to see the church apart from one tiny corner of the church steeple. The hedge consisted of Surinam cherry bushes and the cherries of this species are concealed amongst the branches. No cherries could be seen from the road. So, after looking carefully, first right then left, to make sure no one was coming, I pushed my hand through the railings, and fumbled inside the hedge until I could feel the moist cherries. In my haste, I often squashed the overripe ones, staining my fingers with their blood-red juice. I picked a handful which I ate on the spot, although some were too green and had to be thrown away.

No one ever caught me. And to this day I feel no remorse. Anyone who steals roses and cherries deserves a hundred years' pardon. Besides, cherries would prefer to be eaten once they ripen rather than be allowed to rot on the branch, their virginity intact.

PROGRESSIVE MYOPIA (I)

She did not know if he was intelligent. To be or not to be intelligent depended upon the instability of the others. At times, the things he said suddenly provoked a satisfied and sly look in the adults. Satisfied, because they concealed the fact that they found him intelligent and did not pamper him: sly, because they gained more than he himself did from the things he said. And so when they told him he was clever, he had at the same time the uneasy sensation of unconsciousness; something had escaped him. The key to his intelligence also escaped him. For at times, in trying to imitate himself, he said things that were certain to provoke once more the rapid movement on the chessboard, for this was the impression of automatic mechanism he had of members of his family. For the moment he said something intelligent, the adults would exchange rapid glances, with a smile clearly suppressed on their lips, the slightest hint of a wink in their eye, 'just as we should be smiling now were we not such good educators' – and, just as in the square-dance in some western film, everybody would somehow have changed their partner and place. In short, the members of the family understood each other; and they understood each other at the child's expense. When they were not understanding each other at his expense, they misunderstood each other all the time, as if it were some new form of square-dancing: but even when they misunderstood each other, he felt that they were obeying the rules of a game, as if they had agreed to misunderstand each other.

Sometimes, he would try to reproduce those phrases which had succeeded in provoking movement on the chessboard. Not exactly to repeat past successes, nor exactly to provoke that silent motion from his family. But to try to gain possession of the key to his 'intelligence'. His efforts, however, to understand causes and effects met with failure. Whenever he tried to repeat one of his successful phrases, it brought no reaction whatsoever from the others. His eyes blinking with curiosity, the first symptoms of myopia, he pondered why he had once succeeded in making his family react, but not this time. Was his intelligence judged

by the lack of discipline in others?

Much later, when he replaced the instability of others with his own, he entered into a state of conscious instability. Grown to manhood, he maintained this habit of suddenly blinking at his own thoughts, and twitching his nose at the same time, which caused his spectacles to slip sideways – expressing with his nervous tic an attempt to replace the judgment of others with his own, in his efforts to fathom his own bewilderment. But he was a child with a capacity for balancing forces: he had always been capable of maintaining bewilderment as bewilderment, without its becoming transformed into some other feeling.

Even as a child, he got used to the idea of not possessing the key to himself and his eyes would blink and his nose twitch, causing his spectacles to slip sideways. That no one held that key was something which he had gradually perceived without any disillusionment, his tranquil myopia demanding ever stronger lenses.

Strange though it might seem, it was precisely because of this state of permanent uncertainty and this premature acceptance that no one held the key – because of all this he started growing normally, and living in a state of tranquil curiosity. Patient and curious. A little nervous, they would say, referring to the tic which caused his spectacles to slip sideways. But 'nervous' was how the family labelled their own unstable judgment.

Other adjectives used by these inconstant adults to describe him were 'well-behaved' and 'docile'. Thus giving a name not to what he was, but to their impression of him at any given moment.

Now and then, beneath the extraordinary calm of those spectacles something brilliant, even a little disturbing, occurred inside him, something akin to inspiration.

As, for example, when they told him that in a week's time he was to spend the whole day at the home of a cousin. This married cousin was childless yet she adored children. 'The whole day' included lunch, tea and dinner, before returning home almost falling asleep. As for spending a day with his cousin, that meant being spoiled with unexpected advantages and an incredible eagerness to indulge his every whim. At his cousin's house love would probably be more stable, if only for a day, and there would be no opportunity for making unstable judgments: for one whole day he would be judged the same little boy.

During the week that preceded 'the whole day' he began by

trying to decide if he would behave naturally or otherwise with his cousin. He tried to decide if he should say something intelligent upon arrival – which would result in his being judged intelligent for the whole day. Or if he should do something upon arrival that she would judge 'well-behaved', which would mean that for the whole day he would be the well-behaved boy. To be given the choice of deciding what he would be and for the very first time, for one whole day, caused him to straighten his spectacles every five minutes.

PROGRESSIVE MYOPIA (II)

During the preceding week, the range of possibilities had gradually widened. And, with his capacity for putting up with confusion – he was precise and calm when confronted with confusion – he ended up by discovering that he could even capriciously decide to be a clown if he wanted, for a whole day. Or he could spend the entire day being utterly miserable. What consoled him was to know that his cousin, with her love of children and, above all, with her lack of experience in dealing with children, would accept him, however he decided to be judged. It also reassured him to know that nothing he might be during that day would really change him. For prematurely – being a precocious child – he was superior to the instability of others as well as to his own. He was somehow above his own myopia and that of others. And this gave him enormous freedom. At times, it was simply the freedom of calm disbelief. Even when he grew up, and used the thickest of lenses, he never became aware of this kind of superiority he had over himself.

The week preceding the visit to his cousin was one of endless anticipation. Sometimes he felt cramp in his stomach he felt so anxious: for in that house without children he would be totally at the mercy of a woman's undiscriminating love. 'Undiscriminating love' represented a threatening stability: it would be permanent, and almost certainly result in one way only of judging, and that was stability. For him, stability now meant danger: if the others should err in the first stages of stability, that error would become permanent, without the advantage of instability, which is a possible means of correction.

Another thing worrying him beforehand, was what he would do all day long in his cousin's house apart from eating and being loved. Well, there was always the solution of being able to escape to the bathroom from time to time, and that would help to make the time pass more quickly. But, used to being loved, he was already feeling apprehensive lest his cousin, who was a stranger to him, should look upon his trips to the bathroom with infinite affection. On the whole, the mechanism of his life had become a motive for tenderness. Well, it was also true that, as far as the

bathroom was concerned, the solution might be not to go even once. But not only would that be impossible to achieve for a whole day, but – he did not wish to be judged as 'a boy who will not go to the bathroom' – for that, too, would offer no advantage. His cousin, set in her permanent desire to have children, would simply seize upon his childish behaviour as if it were a false trail of immense love.

During the week that preceded 'the whole day', he did not suffer on account of these evasions. For he had already taken the step that so many never get round to taking: he had accepted uncertainty, and was struggling with its components as intently as someone peering through the lens of a microscope.

During that week, as ideas came to him somewhat spasmodically, they gradually changed in substance. He abandoned the problem of deciding what elements he would give to his cousin so that she in return might give him for a time some certainty of 'who he was'. He abandoned these meditations and tried to establish beforehand the smell of his cousin's house, the size of the small backyard where he would play, the cupboards he would open when she was not looking. And finally, he came to the question of his cousin herself. In what way should he confront his cousin's love for him?

Meantime, he had overlooked one small detail: his cousin had a gold tooth on the left side.

And it was this detail – upon finally entering his cousin's house – it was this detail which upset in a flash the entire scene he had anticipated.

The rest of the day could be described as horrible, had the little boy been inclined to see things in terms of being horrible or not horrible. Or it could be described as wonderful, were he one of those people who hope that things either are or are not.

There was that gold tooth of hers, with which he had not reckoned. But, with the reassurance that he derived from the idea of a permanent unpredictability, so much so that he even wore spectacles, he did not become insecure when he encountered from the outset something he had not expected.

Soon after, the surprise of his cousin's love. His cousin's love was not immediately obvious, contrary to what he had imagined. She received him casually, which he found offensive to begin with, but very soon it no longer offended him. She explained at once that she must tidy up the house and that he could play in the meantime. This gave the boy, quite unexpectedly, a whole

sunny day of leisure to himself.Some hours later, wiping his spectacles, he tried, with an air of indifference, to impress her with his intelligence and made an observation about the plants in the yard. For when he made an observation aloud, he was always thought to be very observant. But his detached observation about the plants received in reply a simple 'of course', amidst rapid sweepings with a broom. So he went to the bathroom, where he decided that, since everything else had failed miserably, he would play at 'not being judged': for a whole day he would be nothing, he simply would not exist. And he pushed the door open with a gesture of freedom.

As the sun rose higher, the gentle pressure of his cousin's love started making itself felt. And when he became aware of it, he was someone who was loved. During lunch, the food became pure love, misguided and stable: beneath his cousin's tender gaze, he adapted himself with curiosity to the strange taste of that food, perhaps because of the different oil, he adapted himself to a woman's love, a new love which was quite unlike the love of other adults: it was a love seeking fulfilment, for his cousin wanted to be pregnant, which is already in itself a maternal love fulfilled. But it was a love without any pregnancy beforehand. It was a love seeking conception *a posteriori*. In short, impossible love.

The whole day long, love demanded a past that might redeem the present and the future. The whole day long, without saying a word, his cousin demanded of him that he should have been born from her womb. That was all his cousin asked of him. She demanded of this little boy with spectacles that she should not be a woman bereft of children. So on that day, he came to know one of the rare forms of stability: the stability of an impossible desire. The stability of an unattainable desire. For the first time he, who was a creature given to moderation, for the first time he felt himself attracted to the immoderate: an attraction for the impossible extreme. In a word, for the impossible. And for the first time he was drawn to passion.

And it was as if his shortsightedness had gone and he could see the world clearly. The deepest and most simple glimpse he had ever had of the kind of universe in which he lived and where he would continue to live. Not a mental glimpse. It was as if he had removed his spectacles, and shortsightedness itself was helping him to see. Perhaps it was from that moment that he formed the habit which he would have for the rest of his life:

whenever he was overcome by confusion and he could barely see anything, he would remove his spectacles on the pretext of cleaning them, and, without spectacles, he would stare at the person who was addressing him with the unflinching gaze of a blind man.

SELF-INFLICTED SORROW

Having been through the experience of having a skin-graft, I realize that any idea of a skin-bank is impracticable because a donor's skin will not adhere for very long to the skin of another person. It is essential that the skin should be removed from another part of the patient's body and then be grafted on immediately wherever needed. In other words, skin-grafting means donating one's own skin to oneself.

This led me to consider other instances where people have to donate things to themselves. And this might bring solitude, riches, conflict. I began thinking about kindness which we would naturally like to receive from others. – Yet sometimes only the kindness we extend to ourselves exonerates us from a sense of guilt. Just as it is useless to win the acceptance of others so long as we are unwilling to accept ourselves for what we are. And as for our frailty, this is the strongest part of our nature, and brings us reassurance and satisfaction. And there are certain sorrows which only our own sorrow, if intensified, can, paradoxically, assuage.

Fortunately, when it comes to love, riches come with mutual donation. Which does not imply there is no struggle: we have to grant ourselves the right to receive love. But the struggle is worthwhile. Just as certain problems, simply because they are difficult, heat our blood, and fortunately this is something we can donate.

And that reminds me of something else we can donate to ourselves: artistic creation. For this also initially involves one in removing skin from one part to graft on somewhere else. And only once that grafting has succeeded can there be any donation to others. Perhaps I am getting confused. Artistic creation is a mystery which happily eludes me. Better not to know too much.

MADNESS WITH A DIFFERENCE

A work of art is an act of madness on the part of the artist. Except that it germinates as non-madness and begins to develop.

Nevertheless it is pointless to plan this *madness* in order to arrive at a vision of the world. Any preliminary vision awakens from the tranquil repose of the majority of those who are asleep, or from the confusion of those who perceive that something is happening or about to happen. The madness of the creative artist is different from that of someone who is mentally ill. The latter, leaving aside other causes unknown to me, has pursued the wrong path. Those who are mentally deranged need a doctor, while artists fulfil themselves by the act of madness itself.

A LIVE EXPERIENCE

Before submitting my story for children, *O mistério do coelho pensante* [The Mystery of the Thoughtful Rabbit], to the publishers, I organized a reading session with a group of children. One was five years old, another seven, another ten and the fourth child twelve years old. A friend of mine who has excellent diction did the reading. My tale about the pensive rabbit made a quite different impression on each of the four children and the reading was frequently interrupted with comments and suggestions. The five-year-old, who was prettier than the rabbit, was only interested in the rabbit's mysterious escape. She interrupted the reader to whisper in his ear that the rabbit had such strong paws that it could lift off the metal roof of the hutch and then replace it all by itself. She subsequently spent hour after hour drawing rabbits, and one of those drawings was so successful that it was displayed on the notice-board at school to illustrate the fine work being done by pupils in the infant school. The seven-year-old boy was going through a difficult phase and his mother was forever receiving notes from his teacher complaining about his bad behaviour. The reading had no sooner started than he spoke out scornfully: 'The rabbit's made of paper and wears spectacles'. Well now, the boy himself had recently started wearing spectacles and was identifying the disenchantment of his own situation with the idea of a rabbit simply made of paper. The ten-year-old boy listened attentively and made several suggestions, all of them intelligent and feasible, in an effort to explain the rabbit's flight. The twelve-year-old boy remained silent: he was the maid's son and was much too shy to say anything. But his eyes were glowing and now and then he would exchange smiles with the ten-year-old boy. I found

this private reading much more rewarding than any *Meet the author* session. There was a true feeling of communication with those children and we were united in our love for the pensive rabbit, by our natural warmth and by a sense of fearless freedom. I even forgot that I myself had written the story and I had no difficulty in entering into the spirit of the game. This was no less true of the other adults who were present. If only one could say the same of those tiresome public appearances to which writers are frequently subjected.

THE 'TRUE' NOVEL

I know perfectly well what makes a true novel. Yet when I read such novels with their web of facts and descriptions, I simply feel bored. And when I write a novel it may not be in the classic mould but it is nevertheless a *true* novel. Except that what guides me in my writing is always a sense of research and discovery. No, not research into syntax for its own sake, but for a syntax which will convey as faithfully as possible what I am thinking when I write. Besides, after careful consideration, it strikes me that I have never *chosen* my language. All I have ever done was to follow my own intuition.

Following my intuition is my method of writing and this is what I am doing at this moment. I continue to follow my intuition without knowing where it will lead me. Sometimes following my intuition can be difficult because things become nebulous and I give up in the end.

And what about those novels where I do not get beyond the title? Well, I find it difficult to take them any further because, once I have a clear idea of how the story is unfolding, I lose all interest. Despite the risks involved, I only enjoy writing as long as I do not know what is going to happen next. Even as I was interrupted by a telephone call a few moments ago, a title came into my head which would do for a short story or novel *O montanhês* [The Mountaineer]. A title with no particular appeal, I agree. And the story would not be about a man from the mountains, but about a man's gradual ascent through life before reaching a symbolic or non-symbolic mountain peak, from where he could look back on his past and at the same time see what still had to be scaled; in other words, what remained of his future.

And what he saw was neither nice nor good, neither bad nor ugly. He saw what life had perforce made of him and what he had been destined to make of his life. And here is the problem: to what extent had fate decreed what he had made of his life or what life had made of him? To what extent had he had any choice? This story is becoming very confused and will probably never be written.

And I, who have travelled a lot and have no longer any desire

to travel, why has it never occurred to me nor is ever likely to occur to me to write a travel book? If you will pardon the expression, I am a mystery unto myself. And part of that mystery is that I read so little. One would expect a writer to have a passion for reading, if only to find out what other writers do. Yet all I ever manage to read these days are those writers who go straight to the heart of the matter. Frankly, I do not understand myself. Yet I slowly carry on writing without even knowing where I am heading. Although in general terms, towards 'a greater love for everything'. Does that sound too vague? A greater love also implies greater awareness of what is beautiful without really being beautiful. And although the word *human* disconcerts me a little with all its various associations which can be meaningless, this word has stuck, and I truly feel that I am heading towards something more human. At the same time, the things of this world – its objects – are becoming increasingly important to me. I see these objects almost without disturbing them, seeing them for what they are. Sometimes they even become fantastic and free, as if they were things born and not created by man. Heading for what is more *human* does not deprive me of this gift of being able to see things as they are. Because – and here I am indulging in sophistry as a means of self-defence – if as a human being I succeed in going on, why should I lose this gift simply by becoming more human? I fear, dear God, that this is pure sophistry. But sophistry as a branch of reasoning has always appealed to me and has become one of my vices. Probably because I have always had to defend myself and sophistry can help. Perhaps I shall now feel less need to defend myself and abandon all sophistry. Sophistry can help one to win a debate – but I have not engaged in any debates in a long time – and it can also help to explain to oneself certain inexplicable acts, etc. From now on I should like to defend myself without any further recourse to sophistry.

I have been jotting down these thoughts at random only to realize that I have strayed so far from the subject that the title of this article has lost all meaning. I'm afraid that is life.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR A SCHOOL NOTEBOOK

– What is the oldest thing in the world?
– One could say that God has always existed.
– What is the most beautiful thing?
– The moment of inspiration.
– And when God created the universe was that not His greatest moment of inspiration?
– The universe has always existed. The cosmos is God.
– What is the greatest of things?
– Love, which is the greatest mystery of all.
– What is the most constant of things?
– Fear. What a pity I cannot reply by saying it is hope.
– What is the best feeling of all?
– Loving and being loved in return, which may sound trite but is something I truly believe.
– What is the most fleeting of premonitions?
– The most fleeting premonition, which passes in a flash, is that instant when a man and woman foresee the promise of a great romance.
– What is the most powerful thing of all?
– The sense of existing.
– What is the easiest thing to do?
– To exist once fear has passed.
– What is the most difficult thing to achieve?
– One's own relative happiness, which comes from self-knowledge.

(Then the questions become more complicated.)

– As a writer, would you describe yourself as timid?
– The moment I start writing I no longer feel timid. On the contrary: I become completely absorbed. But as a person, I often feel inhibited.
– How do your narratives come to life? Do you plan them beforehand?
– No, they gradually develop as I write and they nearly always stem from some sensation, from some word I've heard, from some trifle without substance or form.
– How do you feel while you are actually writing? And once

you have finished writing a book, do you worry about its fate?

– Fortunately, when I am writing I show no signs of the tremendous excitement which sometimes overwhelms me. And however arduous the task, I feel an excruciating happiness. My nerves are on edge and I cannot take refuge in the humdrum reality of everyday life. And once the book is ready to submit to the publisher, I can say like Julio Cortázar: Tighten your bow to the maximum while you are writing, then release it in one go and relax with friends over a glass of wine. The arrow is already speeding through the air and will hit or miss its target; only fools can presume to alter its direction by running after the arrow and giving it that extra push to achieve eternal glory and launch their work abroad.

– What happens to your timid nature while you are boldly engaged in writing?

– I find new courage even while continuing to be timid when it comes to everyday life. I am timid at certain moments and outside those moments I am simply cautious, which is another aspect of my nature. I am an audacious coward: and after each act of great courage my shyness returns.

– Are you yourself aware of your greatest defects?

– I prefer to keep my greatest defects to myself because even I find them offensive. But I can tell you the defects in my character which do me the greatest harm. For example, my irrepressible *hunger* for everything, which makes me extremely impatient and does me no good.

– How sensitive are you to social problems here in Brazil and how do they affect you?

– As a Brazilian, it would be difficult to ignore the social problems which plague my own country. I may not write about social problems but I live them to the full, and even as a child I used to tremble with indignation when I witnessed certain painful realities.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING FOOLISH

– The fool who pursues no ambitions has time to see, hear and touch the world.

– The fool can remain seated for hours on end without stirring. And when anyone asks him if he cannot find something to do, he replies: 'But I *am* doing something. I am thinking.'

– To be a fool sometimes offers an escape route because the astute only think of escaping through their astuteness, while the fool is original and ideas come to him spontaneously

– The fool has the chance to see things the astute fail to see.

– The astute are always so busy paying attention to the wiles of others that they relax in the presence of fools and the latter simply regard them as human beings.

– The fool gains the freedom and wisdom to live.

– The fool never seems to get the chance to shine. Yet the fool is often a Dostoevsky.

– Obviously there can be disadvantages. A foolish woman, for example, trusted the advice of a stranger when buying a second-hand air-conditioning system. He assured her the equipment was almost new and had scarcely been used because he had moved to Gávea where there was plenty of fresh air. So the foolish woman bought the machine without even inspecting it. As a result, it did not work. She then called in a technician who warned her the machine was so badly damaged that it would cost a fortune to repair it: much safer to buy new equipment.

– In compensation, however, the fool always acts in good faith, never mistrusts anyone and lives a tranquil life. While the curious man cannot sleep at night for fear of being deceived.

The astute man pays for winning with a stomach ulcer. The fool does not even notice when he has won.

– Warning: do not confuse fools with donkeys.

– Disadvantage: the fool might receive a knife in the back when he least expects it. This is one of the hazards the fool cannot foresee. Caesar ended up by uttering those famous words: 'You, too, Brutus?'

– The fool voices no protest. But how he shouts!

– Incorrigible buffoons, all fools must go to heaven.

– If Christ had been astute, he would not have been crucified.

– The fool is so endearing that some astute men even try to pass for fools.

– The fool has to be creative but, like any creative act, playing the fool is not easy. That explains why the astute do not succeed in passing for fools.

– The astute gain at the expense of others. In compensation, fools are simply rewarded with life.

– Blessed are the fools because they know without anyone suspecting. Nor do they care if people know that they know.

– Certain places are more congenial for the fool (not to be confused with donkey or simpleton or good-for-nothing). Minas Gerais, for example, is most receptive to fools. Oh, it is amazing how many people lose out because they were not born in Minas!

– Chagall is a fool when he puts a cow into space, flying over roof-tops.

– It is almost impossible to avoid the excess of love a fool arouses. For only a fool is capable of excessive love. And only love makes the fool.

FORGIVING GOD

I was strolling along the Avenida Copacabana and looking distractedly at buildings, a strip of sea, people on the pavement, thinking of nothing in particular. I still had not realized that I was not really distracted but effortlessly observing things. I was being something very rare: free. I was looking at everything and at my leisure. Little by little I began to realize I was perceiving things. My freedom became a little more intense without ceasing to be freedom. It was not a *tour de propriétaire*, nothing of what I perceived was mine nor did I covet it. Yet it seems to me that I felt deeply satisfied with what I saw.

Just then, I experienced a feeling which I had never heard of before. Out of sheer affection, I felt myself to be the mother of God Who was both earth and the world. Out of sheer affection, without any suggestion of arrogance or vanity, without the slightest hint of superiority or equality, I had become the Mother of all that exists. And I knew that if all this were what I *really* felt and not some false sentiment, then God would allow Himself to be loved by me without pride or pettiness and without any compromise. He would find the intimacy with which I loved Him acceptable. This feeling was new to me but unmistakable and, if it had not occurred to me before, that was simply because it could not be. I know that one loves what we call God with grave and solemn love, with respect, fear and reverence. Yet no one ever told me about loving Him as a Mother. And just as this maternal love does not diminish God but makes Him greater, so being the Mother of the World released my love.

Just at that moment I stepped on a dead rat. I bristled immediately with the terror of being alive; in a second I felt shattered by fear and panic, struggling to suppress the piercing scream inside me. Almost running, oblivious to everyone around me, I ended up leaning against a lamp-post, my eyes firmly closed and refusing to look any more. But the sight of that dead rat was engraved in my mind: a reddish-brown rat with an enormous tail, its claws crushed, as it lay there dead, silent, reddish-brown. My uncontrollable fear of rats.

Shivering from head to foot, I somehow managed to go on

living. Totally bewildered, I walked on, the expression on my lips almost childish, such was my surprise. I tried to sever the connection between the two facts: what I had been feeling some moments earlier and then the rat. But it was useless. They were linked at least by their proximity. The two facts were illogically connected. It terrified me to think that a rat should harmonize with me. Repugnance suddenly overwhelmed me: was I unable to surrender to sudden love? What was God trying to tell me? I am not the sort of person who needs to be reminded that there is blood in everything! Far from ignoring that blood, I acknowledge and desire it. There is too much blood in me to allow me to forget blood. For me, words such as spiritual and earthly have no meaning. There was no need to confront me so brutally with a rat. Especially at such a moment, when I felt so exposed and vulnerable! You should have considered the terror that has haunted me since childhood; those rats have already persecuted and mocked me. From ancient times those rats have been devouring me with impatience and loathing! So, was it to be like this? My walking through life asking for nothing, wanting for nothing, loving with a pure and innocent love, and God confronting me with His rat. God's cruelty wounded and outraged me. God was a brute. Walking with a heavy heart, my disappointment as inconsolable as those disappointments I suffered as a child. A child grown prematurely to escape the injustices of childhood. I carried on walking, trying to forget. All I could think of was revenge. But what revenge could I hope for against an Almighty God, against a God Who only needed a rat crushed to death in order to crush me? While all I had was my vulnerability as a mere mortal. In my thirst for revenge, I could not even confront Him. Nor did I know where to find Him or where He might be concealed. Looking with hatred at some thing, would I finally see Him? Perhaps in the rat?... in that window?... in the stones on the ground? For in me, He no longer existed! In me, He was no longer to be seen!

Then the revenge of the weak suddenly occurred to me: so this was what it was like? Very well, I shall break my silence and reveal everything. I know that it is ignoble to enter into someone's confidence and then reveal their secret, but I am going to speak. Say nothing, for love's sake, say nothing! Keep His shameful secrets to yourself! – but I am determined to speak... to explain what has happened to me. This time I shall not be silenced, I shall reveal what He has done to me. I shall destroy His reputation.

...Who knows...perhaps it was because the world is also a rat and I had thought myself prepared...because I imagined myself to be stronger, and converted love into a mathematical calculation which happened to be wrong. I foolishly believed that, by adding up points of understanding, I was expressing my love. I failed to recognize that it is only by adding up misunderstandings that one comes to love. Just because I felt affection, I thought love would be easy. I felt no desire for solemn love, failing to understand that solemnity makes a ritual of misunderstanding and transforms it into an offering. But I have always been difficult by nature and have always put up a fight. I have always tried to go my own way and still have not learned to give in. And because deep down I want to love what I would choose to love rather than what is there to love. For I am still not myself and my punishment is loving a world which is not itself. Also because I am easily offended. Perhaps I need to be told these things bluntly for I am very stubborn. I am also extremely possessive, which may explain why I was asked with some irony whether I also wanted the rat for myself. For I shall only be able to be the mother of things when I can pick up a dead rat in my hand. Yet I know that I shall never be able to pick up that dead rat without dying my worst death. So let me intone the *Magnificat* which blindly exalts what it can neither know nor see. Let me adopt the formalities which distance me, because formalities have not wounded my simplicity but rather my pride. For it is my pride at having been born that makes me feel so intimate with the world – this world which still draws a muffled cry from my heart. The rat exists just as I exist, but perhaps neither I nor the rat is capable of being seen by ourselves, for distance makes us equal. Perhaps I must first accept this nature of mine which seeks a rat's death. Perhaps I consider myself much too delicate simply because I did not commit any crimes. Having suppressed them, I believe my love to be innocent. Perhaps I shall never be able to face the rat until I am able to look into this unruly soul of mine without turning pale. Perhaps I should call *the world* this habit of mine of being a little of everything. How can I love the world's grandeur if I am unable to love the dimensions of my own nature? So long as I imagine that *God* is good simply because I am evil, I shall find myself loving nothing: it will simply be my way of accusing myself. Without even having examined all of myself, I have chosen to love my opposite, whom I wish to call God. I, who shall never

get used to myself, have asked the world to spare me any distress. Having succeeded only in forcing myself to submit to myself (for I am so much more inexorable than myself), I hoped to compensate myself with an Earth less violent than myself.

For as long as I love God only because I do not love myself, I shall be a marked dice, and the game of my greater life will not be played. As long as I go on inventing God, He will never exist.

POSTERITY WILL JUDGE US

When a cure is found to ward off influenza, future generations will no longer be able to understand us. Influenza, while it lasts, is one of the most incurable of organic disorders. Having influenza is to know many things which, if not known, would never need to be known. It is to experience a useless catastrophe, a catastrophe without tragedy. It is a cowardly lament which only another person suffering from influenza can understand. How will future generations ever be able to understand that for us, having influenza was a human condition? We are flu-stricken creatures who will be subjected to censure or ridicule by future generations.

YOUR SECRET

Poisoned flowers in a vase. Red, blue, pink, they carpet the air. How they transform a hospital ward. I have never seen such beautiful and dangerous flowers. So this is your secret. Your secret resembles you so closely that it tells me nothing beyond what I already know. And I know so little, as if I were your enigma. Just as you are mine.

SUNDAY

Such perfume! It is Sunday morning. The terrace has been swept. So he switches on the radio. A late lunch gives one thoughts. He smiles, and gives those thoughts form. There is water on the table but no one is thirsty on a Sunday. And he begins sipping wine without much enthusiasm. At four o'clock they will hoist the flag on the pavilion. (But what he really fears are those tranquil Sunday evenings.)

– Tomorrow I shall be ten years old. I intend to make the most of this last day of my ninth year.

There is a pause. Sadness.

– Mummy, my soul is not yet ten years old.

– How old then?

– I guess about eight years old.

– Don't worry, that's how it should be.

– But I think we should count our years by our soul. People would then say: that chap died at twenty. And the chap had died, but with a seventy-year-old body.

Later he began to sing, then stopped and said:

– I am singing Happy Birthday to myself. But, Mummy, I haven't really made much of my ten years.

– Yes, you have.

– No, no, I don't mean *much* in the sense of doing this and that. What I mean is that I have not really been very happy. What's wrong? Why are you looking so sad?

– I'm not sad. Come here and let me give you a kiss.

– Didn't I tell you? Didn't I say you're looking sad? You can't stop kissing me and when you give somebody all those kisses it's because you're feeling sad.

SPRING IN SWITZERLAND

That spring was really dry, the radio crackled, picking up atmospheric interference; my clothing bristled as it released the body's electricity, and my comb lifted magnetized hairs; it was an ominous spring. And so very empty. From wherever one happened to be, the impression was the same: the journey ahead seemed long, the road endless. There was little conversation: the body was as heavy as its sleep; eyes were big and expressionless. On the terrace, the goldfish gyrated in its tank; we sipped our drinks looking at the countryside. The wind carried the daydreams of goats from the fields. By the other table on the terrace, a solitary faun. Charged with static, we stared dreamily into the glasses in our hands. 'What were you saying?' 'I didn't say a thing.' The days went by. But one moment of harmony was enough to capture once more that barbed static of spring: the rash dreams of goats, the hollow fish, a sudden urge to steal apples, the crowned faun taking solitary leaps. 'What?' 'Nothing. I didn't say anything.'

But I could hear the stirring of a murmur, like a heart beating underneath the earth. Quietly, I put my ear to the ground and could hear summer breaking through, and my heart beating underneath the earth – nothing, I said nothing – and I could sense the persistent violence with which the closed earth was opening up inside as it prepared to give birth, and knew with what burden of sweetness the summer would ripen a hundred thousand oranges, and I knew that those oranges were mine, simply because I wanted it so.

THE LITTLE MONSTER

He is the brightest boy in his class. He never plays games. (His secret is a snail.) His hair is cropped, his eyes are gentle and attentive. His delicate skin at nine years of age is still transparent. He is polite by nature. He handles things without breaking them, lends books to his school-mates, helps them with their lessons, does not lose his patience with the square and the rule, and

never misbehaves, like all the other unruly boys.

His secret is a snail. Which he does not forget for a single moment. His secret is a snail, which he treats with dispassionate and agonizing care. He keeps it safely in a shoe-box. With solicitude he pierces the box every day with a needle and string. With the utmost care he postpones its death. His secret is a snail, nurtured with insomnia and precision.

FLYING THE FLAG

– Today at school I wrote an essay about Flag Day which was so beautiful, but ever so beautiful – for I even used words without really knowing what they meant.

THE ABSTRACT IS SYMBOLIC

In painting, as in music and literature, what is often termed abstract strikes me as being simply representative of a more delicate and elusive reality which is barely visible to the naked eye.

A KINGDOM FULL OF MYSTERY

The *Day of the Tree* was commemorated on the twenty-first of September and this meant hard work for the many children in primary school who were asked to write an essay on the subject. With a weary sigh, those children would undoubtedly have written that the tree provides shade, fruits, etc.

But as far as I know, no one commemorates the *Day of the Plant*, or rather, the *Day of Planting*. And this, too, is an important day in the lives of children and adults. To plant is to create something within Nature. A unique and unrivalled act of creation.

As a child I would often spend the day on a farm, where I had a glorious time. There I would plant maize with so much love and excitement. Then, periodically, I would inquire how those plants I myself had created were coming along.

In Switzerland, many years later, I planted a tomato plant in a large, decorative tin. When the first tomatoes began to appear, still green and hard, I found it unbelievable that I myself had initiated their growth: I had penetrated the mystery of Nature. On waking up each morning, the first thing I would do was to inspect the plant carefully: it was as if the plant were using the darkness of night in order to grow.

Waiting for something to mature is a rare experience: an experience comparable with artistic creation where one is dependent on the slow workings of the unconscious. Except that plants are unconsciousness itself.

In that kingdom, which is different from ours, the plant is born, grows, matures and dies. Without any intention of satisfying some instinct. Or am I deceiving myself in thinking there are no primary instincts in the vegetal kingdom? My tomato plant appeared to have sprouted red tomatoes because that was how I wanted them and for no other reason. They did not have to be useful. Using tomatoes for food is a matter for human beings.

One of the most beautiful, expansive and generous acts of man, as he slowly treads a tilled field, is to scatter seeds on the soil.

And when those tomatoes became big, round and red? The hour of harvesting had arrived. I felt such excitement when I looked at those tomatoes arranged on a plate on the table. They were mine, much more mine than any book I had ever written. Except that I did not have the courage to eat them. As if eating them would have been a sacrilege and contrary to the law of nature. Because a tomato plant is art for art's sake. With no purpose other than that to produce tomatoes.

A plant's rhythm is slow. The plant can only grow with patience and love.

To enter the Botanical Gardens is to be transported into another world. That multitude of free beings. The very air one breathes there is green. And humid. The rising sap gently inebriates us: thousands of plants full of vital sap. Carried by the breeze, the crystalline voices of leaves enfold us in the most delicate web of mysterious sounds. Sitting there on a bench, I feel completely listless: I simply sit there, allowing the world to exist. The vegetal kingdom has no intelligence and possesses only one instinct, that of living. Perhaps it is this lack of intelligence and instincts which allows us to linger amidst the kingdom of nature.

I remember our teacher in primary school asking each pupil to write an essay about a shipwreck, a fire or the Day of the Tree. I wrote my essay grudgingly and with great difficulty. Even at that age I was unable to write without inspiration. So accept this as the essay I was obliged to write in primary school.

ONLY AN INSECT

It took me some time to make out what I was seeing, it was so unexpected and subtle. I was seeing a pale green insect with long legs, which was resting. It was a *grasshopper*, which people were always assuring me is an omen of good fortune. Then the grasshopper began to move very gently across the counterpane. It was a transparent green, with legs supporting its body on a higher and freer plane, a plane as fragile as the grasshopper's own legs, which seemed to consist only of the colour of their outer shell. There was nothing inside those threadlike legs: the inside layer was so thin that it was indistinguishable from the outer layer. The grasshopper looked like a transparency which had come off the paper and was crawling about in green. But however somnambulant, it moved with determination. Somnambulant: the tiniest leaf of a tree which had achieved the solitary independence of those who pursue the blurred traces of a destiny. And it crawled with the determination of someone tracing a line which was simply invisible to the naked eye. It crawled without a tremor. Its inner mechanism was not tremulous, but it had the regular oscillation of the most delicate clock. What could love be like between two grasshoppers? Green and green, and then the same green, which, suddenly, because of a vibration of greens, turns green. Love predestined by its own semi-aerial mechanism. But where were the glands of its destiny and the adrenalines of its parched, green entrails? For it was a hollow creature, a splintered grafting, a simple attraction of green lines. Like me? Me. Us? Us. In that slender grasshopper with its tall legs, which are capable of crawling over a woman's bosom without arousing the rest of her body; in that grasshopper which cannot be hollow because a hollow line does not exist; in that grasshopper, atomic energy is conducted in silence without any drama. Us? Us.

TWO WAYS

It is as if I were trying not to exploit life on the surface but some deeper existence, which provides me with two ways of being. In life, I observe a great deal and I am keen in my observations. I have an eye for the absurd, I am good-humoured and ironic and ready to take a stand. But when I am writing I have insights which are, in a manner of speaking, *passive* and so intimate that they *write themselves* the moment they make their presence felt without any so-called process. Therefore I do not choose when writing. I am incapable of multiplying myself a thousand times over. Yet despite myself, I feel this irresistible urge.

TAKING WHAT WAS MINE

I can recall that spring. I know I ate the pear and threw away half of it. I never feel compassion in the spring. Later we drank water at the fountain and I did not dry my lips. We walked defiantly in silence. As for the swimming-pool, I know that I stayed in the pool for hours. Look at the pool! That was how I saw the pool, contemplating it with tranquil eyes. Calmly taking without compassion what was mine.

ONE FINAL CLARIFICATION

From time to time I receive letters asking me if I am Russian or Brazilian and people invent all sorts of myths about me.

Let me clarify this matter once and for all: I am sorry to have to tell you that there are no mysteries and these myths are untrue. My story is as follows: I was born in the Ukraine, the homeland of my parents. I was born in a village called Tchechelnik, which is too small and insignificant to appear on any map. When my mother was expecting me, my parents were already planning to emigrate either to the United States or to Brazil. They waited on in Tchechelnik until I was born and then set out on their long journey. I was *two months old* when I arrived in Brazil.

I am a naturalized Brazilian and, had my parents set out a few months earlier, I should have been born in Brazil. It was the Portuguese language which influenced my spiritual life and innermost thoughts, and this was the language I used to utter words of love. I began to write short stories as soon as I could read and write and, needless to say, I wrote them in Portuguese. I spent my childhood in Recife and I firmly believe that living in the Northern or North-eastern provinces of Brazil brings one into closer contact with Brazilian life at its most authentic, because there the country is remote from outside influences. My beliefs were nurtured in Pernambuco, the food I enjoy most is from Pernambuco. And from our housemaids I absorbed the rich folklore of those regions. I was already in my teens when we moved to Rio, this vast metropolis I soon began to think of as *Brazilian carioca.*

As for the way in which I roll my r's, as if I were speaking French or some other foreign language, this is simply because of a speech defect. A defect which I have never succeeded in correcting. A defect which my good friend Dr Pedro Bloch tells me can be overcome. He has offered to help me but I am lazy and I know perfectly well I would never do the exercises once I was on my own. And besides my rolled r's are not doing anyone any harm. So that should clear up yet another mystery.

Much more difficult to explain, however, is the path my life has taken. If my family had emigrated to the United States, would

I still have become a novelist, that is to say, a novelist writing in English? In all probability I would have married an American and had American children. And my life would have been completely different. I wonder what I might have written about? Which political party I would have supported? What sort of friends I would have cultivated? There is a real mystery.

'AD AETERNITATEM'

One of my sons when he was very little, announced with great excitement:

– People say we're in the twentieth century, is that true?

– Yes, I replied, watching his anxious expression.

– Gosh, Mummy, we are behind the times!

SILENT WARNING

All the visitations I have received in life have always been the same: people came, sat down, and said nothing. But I understood.

SOMEONE CALLED REGINA

Regina is eighty-two years of age and she lives alone in the tiniest apartment. No one calls her Dona Regina, neither the children, the adults, nor the other old people: everyone simply calls her Regina. Each day she strolls down to the beach where she sits on a bench to enjoy the sunshine and fresh air. She is just like a little bird, but some mornings she wakes up in a bad mood. One day she was seated on her bench when Alfredo, a little boy with whom she was friendly, asked her: 'Regina, won't you play with me?' She made no reply. The little boy asked her again. Whereupon, with the feeble voice of someone who had not yet spoken to anyone that day, she muttered something under her breath. Alfredo turned to his mother who was standing nearby and told her despondently: 'Mummy, Regina's batteries are low today!'

Now and then, Regina writes something down on a piece of paper without any intention of showing it to anyone else or talking about it. She is keeping a diary.

One morning a neighbour who lived in the same building was walking along the sea-front, pushing a pram. The young mother's eyes momentarily met those of Regina and she smiled at the

old woman. Regina gave her a wan smile in return.

When the neighbour returned home, she found that a note had been slipped under her front door.

The note simply said: 'Many thanks for the smile. Regina'.

I HAVE BEEN ABSOLVED!

Someone has sent me a six-page letter about my book for children *A mulher que matou os peixes [The Woman who killed the Goldfish]*. And the letter refers to a sentence in my book: 'You are not to blame if the goldfish died. Their death was not caused through malice but simply because someone forgot to feed them. You are not to blame.'

The letter is signed by Senhorita Inês Kopeschi Praxedes, who lives at Number 87, Rua Maria Balbina Fortes, in Niterói. Right at the end of the letter Inês informs me that she is . . . ten years old.

In her letter, Inês describes all the animals she has kept as pets at one time or another. She once kept goldfish and other types of fish caught in the river. She once had a female cat called Nefertiti and now she has a tom-cat named Figaro. And another cat called Pussy or Ginger because he has orange spots. Then there is another female cat called Jackie who looks as if she were wearing a jacket, and yet another called Plain Jane. The last of her tom-cats is called Pompom: he is very thin, spotted, and crafty. One day Inês saw a cockroach drowning in some water. She rescued the cockroach and named it Rita. She once kept mice and has even cared for three pregnant lizards who laid lots of eggs. A rabbit she once owned was called Dodo. Poor Dodo got sick and died of pneumonia, according to the vet. Inês tells me she has read my book *O mistério do coelho pensante [The Mystery of the Pensive Rabbit]* which she thoroughly enjoyed. She has never kept ducks, only hens. The first hen she adopted was meant for the pot but she pleaded with her father not to kill the poor bird. He gave in and she christened the hen Alice. Alice eventually died from some mysterious illness. But she now has two hens who are alive and thriving. One is called Katie, the other Susanna. The latter has already hatched three little chicks: Goldie, Paladio and Chico. All three little chicks were eaten by Pippo, the dog. As for her pet bitch, Lady, she just turned up one day on the terrace and Inês decided to keep her. She has never kept any monkeys as pets but a friend gave her two tortoises:

Titch and Felicity. She also has a parakeet called Andy (at least I think that's its name, because Inês' handwriting is not always very clear) and another one called Cindy. Then there is her pet skunk Nana. In her letter, Inês does not simply give me a list of names. She also tells me what these animals do, about their funny little ways, what they eat and where they sleep.

I have bought a postcard with a picture of a turtle surrounded by lots of little white eggs. And I am going to write to Inês and thank her for telling me I am not to blame for the death of the goldfish and that I have been absolved. Little Inês and I are the best of friends.

SPAIN

It could scarcely be called singing, in so far as singing means using one's voice musically. It was scarcely vocal, in so far as the voice tends to utter words. Flamenco singing precedes utterance, it is human breathing. Sometimes, the odd word escaped, revealing how that mute singing was achieved. It was all about life, love and death. Those three unspoken words were interrupted by laments and modulations. Modulations of breath, that initial vocal phase which captures the suffering in that opening lament and also the joy in that first outcry of sorrow. And pain. And then another piercing cry, this time of happiness at the outburst of that sorrow. The audience sit huddled round the dancers, looking swarthy and unwashed. After a lengthy modulation which dies away with a sigh, the audience, sounding as exhausted as the singer, murmurs an *olé,* an *amen*, a dying ember.

But there is also that impatient song which the voice alone does not express: then the nervous, insistent tapping of feet intervenes, the *olé* which continually interrupts the song is no longer a response; it is incitement, it is the black bull. The singer, almost clenching his teeth, gives voice to the fanaticism of his race, but the audience demands more and more, until that final spasm is achieved: this is Spain.

I could also hear the song that was absent. It consists of silence interrupted by cries from the audience. Within that circle of silence, a short, gaunt, swarthy little man, with inner fire, hands on hips and head thrown back, hammers out the incessant rhythm of that absent song with the heels of his shoes. This is not music. Not even dance. *Zapateado** predates the choreography of dancing – it is the body manifesting itself and manifesting us, feet communicating to a pitch of fury in a language which Spain understands.

The audience intensifies its wrath within its very silence. From time to time, you could hear the hoarse taunts of a gypsy, all charcoal and red tatters, in whom hunger has turned to passion

* *Zapateado*: the tap-dancing peculiar to Spanish flamenco.

and cruelty. It was not a spectacle, for there were no spectators: everyone present played as important a role as the dancer who was tapping his feet in silence. Becoming more and more exhausted, they can communicate for hours through this language which, were it ever to have possessed words, must have gradually lost them throughout the centuries – until the oral tradition came to be transmitted from father to son like the impetus of blood.

I watched two flamenco dancers partner each other. I have never witnessed any other dance in which the rivalry between a man and a woman becomes so naked. The conflict between them is so open that their wiles are of no importance: at certain moments the woman becomes almost masculine, and the man looks at her in amazement. If the Moor on Spanish soil is Moorish, his female counterpart has lost any languor she ever possessed when confronted with Basque severity. The Moorish woman in Spain is as proud as a peacock until love transforms her into a *maja*.*

Conquest is arduous in flamenco dancing. While the male dancer speaks with insistent feet, his partner pursues the aura of her own body with her hands outspread like two fans: in this way she magnetizes herself, and prepares to become tangible and at the same time intangible. But just when you least expect it, she puts forward one foot and taps out three beats with her heel. The male dancer shudders before this crude gesture, he recoils and freezes. There is the silence of dance. Little by little, the man raises his arms once more, and cautiously – out of fear rather than modesty – attempts with splayed hands to shadow his partner's proud head. He circles her several times and at certain moments almost turns his back to her, thus exposing himself to the danger of being stabbed. And if he has avoided being stabbed, he owes his escape to his partner's unexpected recognition of his bravado: this then is her man. She stamps her feet, her head held high, with the first cry of love: at last she has found her companion and enemy. The two withdraw bristling with pride. They have acknowledged each other. They are in love.

The dance itself now begins. The man is dark-skinned, lithe and defiant. She is severe and dangerous. Her hair has been drawn back, she is proud of her severity. This dance is so vital

* *maja*: low-class woman (especially in Madrid).

that it is hard to believe life will continue once the dance has ended: this man and woman must die. Other dances express nostalgia for their courage. But this dance *is* courage. Other dances are joyful. But the joy of this dance is solemn. Or missing. What matters here is the mortal triumph of living. The two dancers neither smile nor forgive. But do they understand each other? They have never thought of understanding each other. They have each brought themselves as their banner. And whoever is vanquished – in this dance both are vanquished – will not weaken in submission. Those Spanish eyes will remain dry with love and wrath. Whoever is vanquished – and both of them will be vanquished – will serve wine to the other like a slave. Even though that wine may prove fatal once jealous passion finally explodes. The partner who survives will feel revenged. But condemned to eternal solitude. For this woman alone was his enemy, this man alone was her enemy, and they chose each other for the dance.

WORDS PURELY PHYSICAL

In Italy, *il miracolo* is night fishing. Mortally wounded by the harpoon, the fish releases its crimson blood into the sea. The fisherman unloads his catch before sunrise, his face pale and intent in the knowledge that he is hauling the enormous load of miraculous fish over the sands: the miracle of love.

Milagre is the tear falling on the leaf. It trembles, escapes and falls: behold thousands of miraculous tears glistening on the grass.

The *miracle* has the sharp points of stars and much splintered silver.

Le miracle is a glass octagon which can be turned slowly in the palm of the hand. It remains in the hand, but only to be gazed at. It can be seen from all angles, very slowly, and on each side we see a glass octagon. Until suddenly, sensing danger and turning quite pale with emotion, we understand: in the palm of our hand we no longer hold an octagon but *le miracle*. From this moment onwards, we no longer see anything. We possess it.

To pass from the physical word to its meaning is to reduce it first to splinters, just as the firework remains a dull object until it is fated to become a brilliant flare in the sky and achieves its own death. (In its passage from being simply body to something maddened by love, the bee arrives at the supreme moment: it dies.)

THE SCEPTRE

But if we, who are the kings of nature, must know fear, who can hope to be exempt? With trembling paw, we hold the sceptre of power.

BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT DISTRACTED

They felt slightly inebriated as they walked together. They felt that happiness which comes when your throat is dry and you

discover to your surprise that you have your mouth open. They inhaled the air ahead of them and just to have this thirst was almost satisfying. They walked through street after street, conversing and laughing; they conversed and laughed to give substance and weight to this lightheadedness which was the happiness of their thirst. Because of the traffic and crowds, they sometimes touched, and as they touched – thirst is grace, but those waters a secret beauty – as they touched the brilliance of those waters shone, their throats becoming even drier with wonder. How they marvelled at being together!

Until everything transformed itself into denial. Everything transformed itself into denial when they craved their own happiness. Then the great dance of errors commenced. The ritual of mistaken words. He searched without seeing; she failed to see that he had not seen, she who was nevertheless present. He who was nevertheless present. Everything went wrong, and there was dust everywhere on the streets, and the more they wandered, the more bitterly they pursued their goal, unsmiling. All this simply because they had been attentive, simply because they were no longer sufficiently distracted. Simply because they had suddenly become demanding and stubborn, and wanted to possess what was already theirs. All this because they wanted to give something a name; because they wanted to exist, they who already existed. They were then to learn that unless one is distracted, the telephone does not ring; that it is necessary to be out for that letter to arrive, and that when the telephone finally does ring, the wasteland of waiting has already disconnected the wires. All this, all this, because they were no longer distracted.

1971

TWO STORIES WRITTEN MY WAY

Not having anything better to do, I once carried out a little *experiment in writing* to amuse myself. And it worked. I took as my theme a double story by Marcel Aymé. Today by chance, I came across what I had written and it goes like this:

The tale about Félicien Guérillot who owned vineyards but could not bear to drink wine makes a splendid yarn. The story was invented by Marcel Aymé and so well invented that, in order to be true, all it lacked was truth.

Had he lived, Félicien would have lived in Arbois in France and been married to a woman who was sufficiently plain and unattractive to give an honest man peace of mind. He was from a wealthy family who kept a good table, notwithstanding his dislike for wine. And to think he owned the best vineyards in the region. He did not like wine of any kind and searched in vain for some vintage which might rid him of this curse of not being able to appreciate the excellence of what is excellent. And even when he was thirsty and a glass of wine might have been welcome, he only had to take the tiniest sip to feel the most awful nausea. His poor wife Leontina tried to spare him any embarrassment by saying nothing about his curious allergy.

The story, now entirely re-written by me, could be developed very nicely (how I wish I had thought of it first) if I were to follow up my own ideas as to how it should end. Yet Marcel Aymé, who first thought of the story, appears to have lost interest after describing this man who could not stand the taste of wine. And at one point, Aymé himself even intervenes to tell the reader: All of a sudden I find this story boring. And to escape from it, like the man who drinks wine to forget, the author begins to discuss all the things he could invent about Félicien but never will, because he has lost all interest in the character. He expresses his regret, for he would even get Félicien to pretend he was suffering from delirium tremens to conceal from his friends that he has not been drinking. This Marcel Aymé writes extremely well. So much so, that he has taken several pages to tell us what he would have invented about Félicien had he found him more interesting. In fact, while explaining what he might have invented,

Aymé takes the opportunity to fill out his story – only we know this is not the whole story, because what he is inventing may not be the same as what he might have invented had he not lost interest.

And having reached this point, Aymé proceeds to tell another story. No longer interested in this sad story about wine, the plot moves to Paris where we meet up with a man called Duvilé.

And in Paris we find the reverse situation. Etienne Duvilé was a man who loved wine but could not afford it. A bottle of wine was expensive and Etienne was a lowly civil servant. He would have liked to indulge his weakness but saw little chance of being able to defraud the State or steal from the public coffers. His daily lot was a house full of children and a father-in-law whose appetite was insatiable. All his family thought of was food, while poor Duvilé dreamed about wine.

And then one day Etienne really did have a dream. That is to say, a dream while he was asleep. But now that the moment has come to narrate his dream – which Marcel Aymé does at some considerable length – *ça vraiment* no longer interests me. I am suppressing what the author wanted to narrate just as the author suppressed what I longed to know about Félicien.

Suffice it to say that, after dreaming about wine one Saturday night, Duvilé woke up feeling thirstier than ever. And his hatred for his father-in-law made his thirst seem even greater. And things got so bad, with that nagging thirst and no hope of getting any wine, that Duvilé felt like murdering his father-in-law. Aymé does not tell us whether he actually got round to murder nor is it of any interest because all that really matters here is the wine. After dreaming in his sleep, Duvilé now began dreaming while awake, a clear sign of mental disorder. He then wanted to drink the whole world and when they took him to police headquarters he threatened to drink the police commissioner.

To this day, Duvilé is in a lunatic asylum and he cannot wait to get out because the doctors, who have misunderstood the problem, are trying to cure him with some excellent mineral water which may satisfy the odd moment of thirst but not *the great thirst*.

In the meantime, Aymé, probably having taken pity on that thirst, is hoping Duvilé's family will send him to the good vineyards of Arbois where Félicien Guérillot, the protagonist in the first story, after numerous adventures worth telling, ended up acquiring a taste for wine. And since we are not told how this

came about, we finish up with two stories, one by Aymé and the other by me, and both of them unsatisfactory. But when it comes to wine, there should be less talk and more wine.

THE FIRST KISS

The two of them were whispering rather than holding a conversation. They had only recently started going out together and they were both infatuated. This was love. Love with its share of jealousy.

– All right, I believe you when you say I'm the first girl you've fallen in love with and that makes me feel happy. But tell me something. I must know the truth. Have you kissed any other girl before me?

His reply was straightforward:

– Yes, I have kissed a woman before.

– Who was she? the girl asked despondently.

He tried to tell her as simply as possible but could not find the words.The bus was slowly wending its way up the sierra. Amidst the noise of all those other boys and girls on the bus he could feel the cool breeze caress his face and ruffle his hair like long, delicate fingers, gentle and maternal. Just to be quiet at times, to forget one's thoughts and simply feel things – it was so good. But it was difficult to concentrate on feeling amidst all that uproar.

And he had even started to feel thirsty. Gosh, how thirsty one became, fooling around with the others, talking at the top of one's voice in order to be heard above the sound of the engine, listening to all that laughing and shouting, and feeling such deep emotions.

And no sign of water anywhere. The only solution was to gather saliva in one's mouth and that is what he did. He gathered the saliva in his dry mouth and began swallowing it, little by little. But his saliva was warm and failed to quench his thirst. And such thirst, greater than himself, and pervading his entire body.

The gentle breeze, which had been so refreshing, had become hot and arid in the midday sun and as he inhaled it, the little saliva he had so patiently gathered, dried up.

Suppose he were to stop breathing through his nostrils and absorb a little less of that desert wind? He tried for a few seconds but almost immediately choked. It was a question of waiting, just waiting. Perhaps for a few minutes, perhaps for hours, although his thirst had been there for years.

Without knowing how or why, he somehow felt closer to water, sensed there was water nearby and his eyes stared wildly

out of the window in search of the road, searching amongst the bushes, spying, sniffing.His animal instinct had not failed him: on an unexpected bend in the road, amongst the bushes, there it stood...a fountain from which that water he had dreamed of descended in a steady stream.

The bus stopped, they were all feeling thirsty but he got to the stone fountain ahead of the others.

Closing his eyes, he parted his lips and pressed them firmly to the orifice from where the water was emerging. Those first cool drops ran trickling down his chest on to his stomach.

It was as if life were returning and the water flooded his inner dryness until his thirst was quenched. Now he could open his eyes once more.

He opened them and found himself staring straight into the eyes of a stone statue, her face almost touching his. It was the statue of a woman and the water was pouring from her mouth. He recalled that when he had taken that first sip something icy had made contact with his lips, something colder than water.

And he then realized that he had pressed his lips to the mouth of this female statue. Life had streamed from those stone lips, passing from one mouth to the other.

Confused in his innocence, he intuitively felt perplexed: it is not from woman that life-giving semen comes, that germinating sap of life... He stared at the naked statue.

He had kissed her.

He felt a tremor which was outwardly invisible and which started deep down inside him, possessing his entire body as it finally exploded and caused his cheeks to burn.

He took a step backwards or was it forwards, for he no longer knew what he was doing. Puzzled and apprehensive, he could see that part of his body which had always been so relaxed, and which had now become aggressively tense. This had never happened to him before.

He was standing there, suppressing his aggression, alone amidst the others, his heartbeat slow and barely audible, listening to the world transforming itself. Life was completely new, different, a fresh discovery which left him uneasy. He felt bewildered and somewhat shaken.

Until from the depths of his being, truth surfaced from some hidden source. Filling him with anxiety and at the same time with pride such as he had never felt before. He...

He had become a man.

ANIMALS (I)

Sometimes I tremble all over when I come into physical contact with animals or even so much as look at them. I seem to have a certain fear and horror of that living creature which is not human yet has the same instincts, although in the animal those instincts are freer and indomitable. An animal never substitutes one thing for another, is never forced to sublimate things as we are. And that living thing moves! It moves independently because of this nameless thing which is Life.

I once drew a friend's attention to the fact that animals do not laugh, and she informed me that Bergson makes the same observation in his essay about laughter. And although I am convinced that dogs sometimes laugh, they smile with their eyes which suddenly turn brighter, with their gaping mouths as they pant and wag their tails. But cats never laugh, although they can be playful. I have had plenty of experience with cats. As a little girl I owned a rather common tabby-cat with stripes in various shades of grey. Cunning as could be, she had that feline instinct which made her suspicious and aggressive. My tabby-cat was forever having kittens and always with the same tragic outcome: I would insist I wanted to keep all the kittens at home, while unbeknown to me they were given away to who knows whom. And I kicked up such a fuss that one day I returned from school to find that my tabby-cat had disappeared. She, too, had been given away. The shock was so great that I took to my bed with fever. My family tried to console me by giving me a cat made of felt which I thought ridiculous. How could that dead, limp *thing* ever replace the supple energy of a live tabby?

Speaking of live tabbies, a friend of mine has decided to have nothing more to do with cats. He finally lost his patience with his tabby-cat who would get into such a frenzy when she was on heat that she would miaow day and night and keep all the neighbours awake. Then, without any warning, she would become almost hysterical and throw herself from the roof on to the ground below, causing herself serious injury. When I told my maid this sad story, she exclaimed 'Holy Mother of God' and made the sign of the Cross.

I have little or nothing to say about the sluggish turtle with that rock-hard shell on his back, covered in dust. This dinosaur which dates from the Tertiary Period is of no interest to me. The turtle is extremely stupid and relates to nothing, not even to itself. Sexual contact between two turtles has neither warmth nor life. And although I am no scientist, I can confidently predict that the species will disappear within the next few thousand years.

As for chickens and how they relate to themselves and to humans and, above all, to the egg they conceive, I have already said all there is to say. And I have also written at some length about monkeys.

I was already married and living in Naples when I bought a mongrel from a beggar-woman in a busy thoroughfare. I felt at once that he had been born for me and he must have felt the same, for I could tell that he was overjoyed and, without so much as giving a backward glance at his former owners, he came trotting after me, wagging his tail and licking my legs. It would take forever to narrate my adventures with this dog, who reminded me of a Brazilian mulatto urchin, despite the fact that my mongrel had been born in Naples. I christened him Dilermando, a rather grand name which aptly described the wise expression and knowing ways which made him so endearing. I could tell you so much about my beloved Dilermando. There was such a strong bond between us and such a natural affinity that he could sense my every thought and emotion. Whenever I was typing, he would sit at my feet looking just like a drowsing sphinx. And if I interrupted my typing to think about something, or because I had come up against a problem, he would open his eyes at once, raise his head and gaze at me with one ear cocked... waiting. And the moment I solved the problem and returned to my typing, he would settle down again, close his eyes and go back to dreaming: because dogs – believe me – can dream. No human being ever showed me as much love and wholehearted devotion as this mongrel.

When my sons were no longer babies, we presented them with a lovely big dog who patiently allowed the younger boy to ride on his back. And without being asked, this dog decided to guard the house and the entire street with fierce barking which kept the neighbours up all night. I once gave my sons some little yellow chicks who followed us everywhere, and got under our feet as if we were the mother-hen, for those tiny little creatures

were as much in need of a mother as any human. The relationship between humans and animals is unique and cannot be compared to any other. Looking after animals is something everyone should experience. People who have never owned a pet animal lack a certain intuition of the living world. People who refuse to have anything to do with animals are afraid of themselves.

Yet sometimes I tremble all over when I look at animals. On occasion I can even sense that primeval cry buried inside me when I am with them. It is almost as if I no longer know who is more animal, me or the animal. I become totally confused, as if I were afraid of confronting my own suppressed instincts, which I am obliged to assume in the presence of animals, demanding as they are. And what else can we poor humans do? I once knew a woman who humanized animals, chatting to them and transmitting her own traits of character. But I do not humanize animals for I should find that offensive – one must respect nature – and it is I who *animalize* myself. Far from being difficult, this adjustment comes naturally. It is simply a question of surrendering, without putting up a struggle.

But after much thought, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing more difficult in this world than to surrender completely. This is one of man's greatest sorrows.

To imprison a tiny bird in the palm of one's hand is horrifying. The poor little bird puts up a frantic struggle, flapping its wings in desperation. You can feel hundreds of little fluttering feathers until the feeling becomes so unbearable that you open your hand quickly and either free the bird or return it to its owner so that it might be restored to the greater freedom, relatively speaking, of its cage. Frankly, I prefer to see birds in the trees or flying through the air and well out of my reach. Perhaps one day, after rather more prolonged contact with the birds of Augusto Rodrigues in the Largo do Boticário, I shall get to know them intimately and be able to rejoice in their ethereal presence. ('To rejoice in their ethereal presence' gives me the feeling of having said in a nutshell precisely what I mean. It is a strange feeling, and who knows, I could be deceiving myself, but that is another matter.)

It would never occur to me to keep an owl. But a little friend of mine found a baby owl grounded in the woods at Santa Teresa, all alone and missing its mother. She took it home, made it comfortable, fed it, consoled it and eventually discovered that it liked raw meat. When the baby owl became stronger she

expected it to fly off at once, but the owl hovered nearby, before setting off in pursuit of its own destiny and being reunited with its own species. This strange bird had obviously become attached to my little friend and was reluctant to abandon her. It would fly off a little way and then come back almost immediately. Until finally, with one great effort, as if struggling with itself, the owl made a bid for freedom and went flying off to the ends of the earth.

ANIMALS (II)

The rabbit's silence, its habit of nibbling carrots ever so quickly – its uninhibited copulation at frequent intervals and with the utmost haste – who knows why I should find the sexual habits of rabbits so futile and, to all appearances, so very superficial? Rabbits make no impression on me whatsoever; we are simply worlds apart, entirely different, our species mutually alien. Strange how the rabbit can be imprisoned and seem almost resigned yet cannot be domesticated: its resignation is merely apparent. In fact, however futile and nervous it might be, the rabbit is free and this is somehow at odds with its superficiality.

As for horses, I have written at length about horses roaming the prairie in *A Cidade sitiada* [The Besieged City] where the white horse, the king of nature, neighs triumphantly at dusk into the remote horizon. And I have experienced a close rapport with horses. I can recall in my youth standing proud and erect in imitation of the horse, as I stroked his glossy, velvety coat and ran my fingers through his wild mane. And what a perfect picture we made: 'The maiden and the horse'.

Fish in an aquarium never stop swimming for a second. This disturbs me. Besides, I find fish in an aquarium insipid, shallow creatures. But perhaps I am wrong, for not only do they gobble up food but they even manage to procreate: so they must be living matter if they can do these things. What intrigues me is that, at least in the case of fish in an aquarium, they have no instinct: they eat until they are ready to burst, do not know when to stop and, all of a sudden, what you see are dead fish. They are nervous creatures when they are small, dangerous once they grow big. And furthermore they belong to an unknown world and that, too, disturbs me.

I must tell you an interesting little story. A Spanish friend of mine, Jaime Vilaseca, lived for some time with relatives in a tiny village lost amongst the snow-covered slopes of the Pyrenees. Winter invariably brought the starving wolves down into the village in search of food. Whereupon all the inhabitants moved indoors, taking their sheep, horses, dogs and goats with them. And there they remained, humans and animals snuggling up

against each other in one room and listening to those ravenous wolves clawing at locked doors...

And I know a story about a rose, strange though it may seem to mention a rose when I am talking about animals. But this rose behaved in such a manner that it brings to mind the mysteries of instinct and intuition associated with animals. A medical acquaintance, Dr Azulay, is a psychoanalyst and the author of *Um deus esquecido* [A Forgotten God]. He was in the habit of taking a rose with him every other day to his consulting-rooms, where he would put it into one of those tall, narrow vases specially designed for a single rose. Every other day the flower would start to wither only to be replaced by a fresh rose. But there was one particular *Rose*. It was bright pink, the work of nature rather than artifice. The sheer beauty of that rose filled one's heart with joy. Proudly displaying its opulent bloom, its thick, velvety petals, that rose gave the impression of standing upright in all its splendour and beauty. Well, perhaps not altogether upright, for with infinite grace it leaned ever so slightly forward on its tall, slender stem. An intimate relationship soon developed between Dr Azulay and that rose: he was full of admiration and the rose sensed his appreciation. The rose went on being glorious under his loving gaze and as the days passed she showed no sign of withering. The rose remained there in full bloom and as fresh as ever. And so she remained for a whole week. Eventually, the rose began to show signs of fatigue and finally died. With some reluctance my friend put another rose in her place. But he never forgot that rose. And some weeks later, one of his patients unexpectedly asked: 'What became of that rose?' Dr Azulay knew at once which rose the patient was referring to. That rose which had gone on living out of love had made an impression. His patient had observed how Dr Azulay used to gaze at that flower and nourish it with his own vital energy. The patient had unwittingly perceived that there was something going on between him and the rose. That rose – which I am almost tempted to call '*joie de vivre*' – had so much natural instinct that both man and flower had experienced that deep rapport one only finds between man and beast.

Suddenly I feel unbearable pangs of nostalgia for my beloved Dilermando, the same nostalgia he must have felt when he was adopted by another family when I had to go and live in Switzerland. Alas, I was misinformed when someone assured me that the hotels where we were obliged to stay for several months

would not accept animals. I cannot help smiling to this day when I remember how I once left Dilermando with a friend in Italy while I returned briefly to Brazil. Upon my return, I rushed to my friend's house to collect Dilermando. We were already in the middle of winter and I was wearing a fur coat. The dog stood there staring at me, rooted to the spot. He then approached and caught a whiff of the fur which seemed to worry him as if he sensed the presence of some threatening animal. And to add to his confusion, he could also smell my perfume. The poor dog got into a terrible state and began chasing his own tail. Without moving, I waited for him to settle down and finally recognize me. Fussing over him would only have made matters worse. After a while I began to feel hot in the warm room and removing my coat I threw it onto a sofa some distance away. Whereupon Dilermando caught my scent and jumped straight on to my lap with one mighty leap, beside himself with excitement and licking and scratching my face and arms. I laughed with joy and shrugged off those superficial bites he tried to inflict. They were hardly the real thing. Nor did they harm me, for they were love bites.

Not to have been born an animal seems to be one of my secret regrets. Their call comes to me from some remote past and I can only respond with profound disquiet. Their call summons me.

DE NATURA FLORUM

'And the Lord God planted a
garden in Eden; and there He put
the man whom He had formed.'
– Genesis II: 8

Dictionary

Nectar – A sweet juice found in many flowers and which insects avidly pursue.

Pistil – Female organ of the flower usually situated at its base and containing the seed in its first stages of growth.

Pollen – Fertilizing powder, produced on the stamens and contained in the anthers.

Stamen – Male organ of the flower comprising the style and the lower part of the anther around the pistil which, as previously stated, is the flower's female organ.

Pollination – The union of the two elements of generation (male and female) which produces the fertile fruit.

Rose – Is the feminine flower which gives so much of itself that all it retains is the joy of giving. The rose's perfume exudes feminine mystery; if deeply inhaled, it reaches the depths of one's soul and perfumes one's entire body. There is nothing more pleasing than to watch the rose flower into womanhood. Try crushing those petals between your lips. They taste so good. The dark red roses of the *Príncipe negro* [Black Prince] variety are extremely sensuous. Yellow roses, a joyful surprise. White roses inspire serenity. The pink varieties are usually fleshier and their pinkness is their most striking feature. Orange-coloured roses, on the other hand, are sexually appealing.

Carnation – Has an aggressive note provoked by a certain irritation. There is something harsh and insolent about those petals. The carnation's perfume is somehow deadly. Red carnations are shrill, such is the violence of their beauty. While white carnations bring to mind the tiny white coffins used to bury infants; and then the scent becomes pungent.

Sunflower – The Sun's offspring which from birth instinctively

turns its huge bloom in its mother's direction. It does not matter whether the Sun is father or mother. Difficult to say. You may be wondering whether the sunflower is female or male? I would say male. But one thing is certain: the sunflower is Russian, and most likely Ukrainian.

Violet – She is bashful. She is profoundly introspective. She does not shrink away, as some say, out of modesty. She shrinks away in order to be able to understand her own secret. Her perfume is glorious but demands a quest from human beings: her perfume conveys the inexpressible. A bunch of violets is almost like saying: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'.

Everlasting Flower – Forever dead. This flower longs for eternity. The name in Greek means *golden sun*.

Daisy – A cheerful little flower. It is simple and has only one layer of petals. Its yellow heart provides a game for children.

Palm – Has no perfume. Arrogant in appearance and proud of its colour and formation. And decidedly masculine.

Orchid – Perfect, *exquise* and obnoxious. Anything but spontaneous. She needs to be under glass. But there is no denying her splendour and nobility. Epiphytic, the orchid grows on another plant without depriving it of its nutrition. I was lying when I said orchids are obnoxious: I adore them.

Tulip – Is only a tulip when standing in an enormous field of tulips in bloom as in Holland. There simply is no such thing as a single tulip.

Corncockle – only grows in cornfields. For all its modesty, it is sufficiently bold to assume various forms and colours. The corncockle is biblical. In Spain it is used to decorate the Christmas manger, together with sheaves of corn from which it is inseparable.

Angelica – Has the odour of a chapel. It has an aura of mystical ecstasy. It reminds one of the Host. Many feel the desire to eat it, tasting to the full its potent and sacred perfume.

Jasmine – Is for lovers: they walk hand-in-hand, swinging their arms, and exchanging tender little kisses to the sweet-smelling music of jasmine.

Bird-of-Paradise Flower – Is unmistakably male. Its love is so aggressive, its pride so wholesome. This flower resembles a cockscomb. And like the cockerel, it has its own cry but never waits for dawn. On closer inspection, it appears to cry out to the world as another day is born.

Azalea – Sometimes pronounced *azálea* but I prefer the alterna-

tive Brazilian spelling *azaléia*. It is spiritual and delicate; a happy flower which brings happiness. And lovely to behold in its humility. In Brazil, this name is also used for people – like my friend Azaléia – who somehow acquire the qualities of this flower. These flowers are a pleasure to touch. My friend gave me lots of white azaleas which perfumed my apartment with their strong scent.

Deadly Nightshade – Smells like a full moon. It is phantasmagoric and a little frightening: it only comes out at night with its strange, intoxicating and silent odour. It is also the flower of dark, deserted corners of gardens, surrounding unlit houses with shuttered windows. The deadly nightshade is lethal.

Cactus-flower – The flower of the cactus is succulent, often huge, highly perfumed and colourful. Its petals are red, white and yellow. This is her succulent revenge on behalf of all desert plants: the cactus is splendour emerging from tyrannical sterility.

Edelweiss – Only found on mountain slopes but never above an altitude of 3400 metres. This Queen of the Alps, as she is called, is the symbol of human conquest. She is white and downy. Rarely within reach, this flower symbolizes man's aspirations.

Geranium – A flower grown in window-boxes in Switzerland, São Paulo and Grajaú. Its fleshy leaves have a pungent odour.

Victoria Lily – In Rio's Botanical Gardens, these huge lilies are almost two metres in diameter. They are aquatic and incredibly beautiful. Like Brazil itself, they are gigantic. Ever changing, they are white to begin with, then pink or even red. At once majestic and most unassuming, they radiate utter tranquillity. And although they rest on the surface of the water, they afford shade.

TO THE RHYTHM OF MY TYPEWRITER

Heavens, how love impedes death! Difficult to explain what I mean by that. But I am trusting in my incomprehension which has made me instinctive and intuitive, while so-called comprehension is so limited. I have lost friends. I do not understand death. But I am not afraid of dying. Death will bring respite: a cradle at last. I shall not hasten death, I shall drink the bitter gall of life to the very last drop. It upsets me when people insist I have a certain affinity with Virginia Woolf, for I cannot bring myself to condone her suicide. Besides, I only began to read her novels after I had published my first book. My awesome duty is to carry on to the bitter end. And without being dependent on anyone, to live my own reality. To discover the truth. But in order to mitigate the pain, I must become hardened. For I can no longer carry the burden of the world's sorrows. What can I do to prevent myself from feeling with such intensity what other people are and what they are suffering? I share those lives, but I no longer have the strength. I now intend to live *my own life* for a change. I intend to shut myself away. Certain things I shall never reveal: neither in my books nor in my weekly column. Certain things I shall never confide to a living soul. A man once told me that in the Talmud there are things one must reveal to others, things one can reveal to some, and things one must reveal to no one. Moreover, there are certain things I have no desire even to tell myself. I feel that I can intuit certain truths. But I am not sure whether I understand them. I must mature a little in order to get closer to those truths. Truths which I can already predict. But truths cannot be put into words. Truths or truth? No, I am not referring to God: truth is my secret.

Imagine a lovely autumn day. The entire shore swept by a pleasant breeze, by a sense of freedom. And I found myself alone. And at such moments, I need no one. I must learn to be alone. But it is a problem, because I feel the need to share my feelings with someone. The sea was calm. So was I. But I was wary and on my guard. Wondering if that calm would last. There is always something about to happen. And the unforeseen fascinates me.

I have twice experienced such a close relationship with

another person that I ceased to exist. How can I explain it? We looked into each other's eyes and said nothing, and I became that other person and that other person became me. It is so difficult to speak, so difficult to express things that cannot be said because of their silence. How can one express a deep, unspoken bond between two souls? It is difficult to describe. We stood there, staring at each other for several moments. We were one and the same person. Such moments are my secret. There was what one might call a perfect rapport. Or what I would call a heightened state of bliss, when one becomes incredibly lucid and feels oneself on a higher plane of existence. Those were the most exalted moments I had ever experienced. Except that afterwards...afterwards I realized that for the other person those moments meant nothing, his thoughts were elsewhere. I had been alone, all alone. My suffering was so great, it was beyond expression.

I must pause for a moment to deal with the man who has come to repair my record-player. Who knows how I shall be feeling by the time I get back to my typewriter? I have not listened to any music for some time now in my efforts to control my emotions. But recently I was caught off my guard when I went to see the film *Cada um vive como quer [Five Easy Pieces]*. The music in the film made me weep. There is nothing shameful in weeping. What is shameful is that I should confess it in public. I am paid to write. So back to my column.

Here goes. It is still a lovely day. But the cost of living is high (I am referring to what the man charged me for repairing my record-player). I have to work hard these days to be able to afford the things I want and need. I doubt whether I shall be writing any more books. I shall stick to journalism. I should have preferred a part-time job for two or three hours each day, a job which would bring me into contact with other people. I enjoy dealing with people, even though I often give the impression of being lost in my own world. But when I am with a real person, I, too, become a real person. And just in case you imagine I am about to revise this article before submitting it to my editor, you are sadly mistaken. It will be published as it stands. And I shall only read it through to correct any typing errors.

That reminds me of someone whose use of punctuation was entirely different from mine. I prefer to think of punctuation as the way a phrase breathes. This is something I have stated more than once. I myself write as I breathe. Does that sound esoteric?

Am I making myself clear? I hope so, because anyone writing a column for a newspaper must be terribly explicit. Am I being explicit? Between ourselves, I could not care less.

I must have a cigarette. Perhaps I shall go back to my typewriter or stop right here.

I am back. Now I am thinking about turtles. When I wrote an article about animals I said, quite intuitively, that the turtle is a dinosaur. It was only afterwards that I discovered this to be true. Honestly, the things that happen to me. One day I shall write a story about turtles. They fascinate me. Besides, all living creatures, with the exception of man, are a cause for wonder. It is almost as if, after the human species had been created, there was a lot of dynamic matter left over and so animals were created. What use is a turtle, for Heaven's sake? The title of the piece I am now writing should not have been *To the Rhythm of my Typewriter*. I should have posed a question, such as *And what about the turtle*? And anyone reading this would say to himself: It's true. I haven't thought about turtles in a long time. I really must stop now. Goodbye until next Saturday.

FAMILY OUTING

On Sunday evenings, the entire family would go to the pier to watch the ships. They would lean over the parapet and, if Father were alive today, perhaps he would still be watching those oily waters which he used to examine so intently. His daughters would become vaguely uneasy, they would summon him to come and look at something more interesting: look at the ships, Daddy! they would point out to him impatiently. As darkness fell, the illuminated city turned into a great metropolis with high revolving stools in every café. The youngest daughter insisted upon sitting on one of those high stools and Father found this amusing. This was great fun. Then she would try to be even more entertaining just to please him, and that was not so amusing. She chose something to drink which was not expensive, although the revolving stool increased the price of everything. The rest of the family stood around, watching this ritual of pleasure. A child's timid but voracious pursuit of happiness. This was when she discovered the Ovaltine they served in cafés. Never before had she experienced such luxury whipped up in a tall glass, made all the taller because of the froth on top, the stool high and wobbly, as she sat *on top of the world*. Everyone was watching. The first mouthfuls almost made her sick, but she forced herself to empty the glass. The disturbing responsibility of an unfortunate choice; forcing herself to enjoy what must be enjoyed, and thus adding the indecisiveness of a rabbit to her other weaknesses. There was also the terrifying suspicion that *Ovaltine* is good: it is I who am no good. She fibbed, insisting that her drink was delicious because the others were standing there watching her enjoy the luxury of happiness which cost money. Did it depend on her whether they believed or not in a better world? But she was extricated from this problem by her father, and she felt safe within this intimate circle, where to stroll holding hands constituted the family. On the way home, her father remarked: Without really doing anything, we have spent so much money.

Before falling asleep, lying in bed in the dark. Through the window, on the white wall: the huge, swaying shadows of the

branches, looking as if they belonged to some enormous tree which did not actually exist in the patio. All that grew there was a straggly shrub: or perhaps it was the moon's shadow. Sunday was always that immense, contemplative night which gave existence to all future Sundays and produced cargo ships and oily waters and produced a milky drink with froth and the moon and the gigantic shadow of a tiny fragile tree. Just like me.

MOTHER'S DAY. A PIOUS INVENTION

Location – Refuge for Abandoned Children; an old building in colonial style; innumerable pavilions with spacious rooms; high ceilings; barred windows.

Number of Children – Six hundred.

Age of Children – Varied.

History – Founded around 1778.

Founder – A Portuguese millionaire who owned the mansion and felt something must be done to rescue abandoned children.

Aims of the Refuge – To house, educate and bring up orphans or children abandoned by their parents.

Director – Sister Isabel, a nun of the Order of St Vincent: white habit; medium height; plump, smiling, imaginative, energetic and loquacious; an expressive face which becomes solemn when she is worried; she moves briskly and with remarkable agility in her white habit, which is always immaculate; a born leader; in no sense conventional; a lively creature who finds a ready solution to every problem. To all appearances oblivious of her own intelligence, she is open and spontaneous: she believes nothing is impossible and once she has made up her mind she acts without a moment's hesitation. She never shrinks from hard work.

The Facts – Sister Isabel has just been appointed Sister Superior of the Refuge for Abandoned Children, in other words, the Director. She is gradually finding her way around the Refuge. There are six hundred files to be read, one for each child. She notices that in the majority of cases, the parents of the children are unknown. An average file reads: João de Deus, born the tenth of December, 1965. Place of birth: State of Guanabara. Colour: black. Parentage: none. There is a blank space. She is gradually getting to know the children, one by one. Most of them ask her: Who is my mummy? To conceal her embarrassment, Sister Isabel changes the subject. But the children are insistent: Who is my mummy? Sister Isabel thinks hard. Much distressed, she searches for some impossible solution. For hours she stands lost in thought before that enormous filing cabinet, biting her lips.

Result – She reaches a decision. She goes through the cards

one by one, undeterred by the fact that there are six hundred of them to be read. And wherever there is an empty space after the word *Parentage* she invents a mother for every parentless child. She writes in over and over again names like Maria, Ana, Virginia, Helena, Maddalena, Sofia, etc.

Conclusion – She sends for each child without parents and informs them: Your mummy's name is Maria, or Ana, or Sofia, etc. The children are overjoyed: now they all have a mother and they are so happy that they do not even mind if she never comes to see them. Sister Isabel always finds some excuse to explain why their mother cannot be with them. A pure invention, those mothers are a fiction and non-existent. They only exist on paper yet they are somehow alive, caring and affectionate.

Finale – Here my story ends and there is nothing more to tell you.

BEFORE MAN APPEARED ON EARTH

There came into my possession – I cannot say how I came to possess it or reveal who gave it to me – a stone from Vila Velha. Vila Velha is a region of Paraná, stretching from Curitiba to the Municipality of Ponta Grossa. The Stone Age: the last deglaciation of the Earth, three hundred and sixty thousand years ago. The geologists have reached this conclusion after studying the layers of the Earth's crust and carrying out carbon-dating tests. This process is applied to fossils. My stone, therefore, dates back to the period before man appeared on Earth. I love stones. And how I treasure this particular stone. It gives me the strangest feeling when I hold it in my hand. Given to me by a dear friend, I felt I ought to share it with someone close to me. But it proved impossible to break the stone. So I finally went to a marble-cutter who succeeded in dividing it. He was amazed and told me: I have never seen anything like it before. He pointed out the presence of tiny little gold chips, especially in the reddish part of the stone.

A twenty-year old youth called Sérgio Fonta came to dinner one evening. He saw the stone and I told him the story. He held it in his hand. Sérgio is a poet. On leaving us that same evening, he suddenly felt inspired to write a poem about the stone. To my delight, he dedicated it to me. And here is the poem itself:

The Poem of The Stone for Clarice Lispector*

Stone
And
Wilderness.
Man?
Distance keeps him

* Pedra e Desomem. / Homem? / A distância o afasta, / Passa a pasta dos séculos / Cada vez mais. / Ser e / Não ser o primeiro / Ou a primeira / Coisa. / Homem? / E a pedra? / Desomem. / Antes de seu rastro, / De seu cheiro. / Pedra, homem. / Pedra há muito tempo pedra. / Um passado de poço. / Multi-horas / Canalizadas à sua frente, / Você nem gente, / Sem saber, / Sem berrar / Essa angústia universal. / Anterior / À cena e ao beijo escapado, / Ao grito e ao riso degolado. / A pedra e / Todos os segredos. / Os irremovíveis segredos. / A pedra e o / Silêncio.

At bay.
The pulp of ages
Relentlessly disappears.
To be and not to be
The first Creature
Or Thing.
Man?
Stone?
Wilderness.
Before trace
Or scent
Of man.
Stone, man.
Stone for ages stone.
A fathomless past.
Endless hours
Channelled before him.
Not yet human,
Untouched
Unscathed
By this universal fear
Preceding
The Supper and furtive kiss,
Cries of dismay and broken laughter.
The stone and
All its secrets.
Those enduring secrets.
The Stone and
Silence.

Rio, 16 March 1971

INEVITABLE DEATH

The inestimable Guimarães Rosa has died, my darling Carlito, the little son of my friends Lucinda and Justino Martins has died, my dear brother-in-law, Mozart Gurgel Valente, Brazilian Ambassador to the United States has died, the son of Dr Neves Manta has died, a thirteen-year-old girl who lived in my block has died leaving her mother beside herself with grief, my tempestuous friend Marino Besauchet has died. Forgive me, but death is inevitable.

BUT THERE IS LIFE

But there is life and it should be lived to the full. And there is love. There is love. Love which should be lived to the very last drop. Without fear. For love kills no one.

STORM OVER RIO. SUNDAY 28 MARCH

Do you by any chance remember Sunday, the twenty-eighth of March? There was a football match that day between Botafogo and Vasco. It had been unbearably hot all morning, the beach was like an inferno. By afternoon, the heat was even worse. I prayed for a downpour of rain. But later found myself mystified by that explosive 'fury of the elements of nature'. I had planned an outing with a friend to the picturesque Açude da Solidão to compare the region with the landscape in my painting by Piero della Francesca. Suddenly, feeling overcome by the heat and sensing that something awful was about to happen, I told my friend: I've changed my mind. I no longer want to go to Tijuca. She felt the same. So we went out for a drive instead. We headed for Leblon and visited the church at Lagoa, which is very beautiful, I mean the church rather than the location. The sky began to darken until it finally turned black. I suggested: Let's buy some sandwiches at Rick's place and take them home because there's a storm brewing.

We were in the car when the storm finally broke. I have never seen anything like it. The wheels of the car were soon submerged in muddy water. We could not see anything in front of us. My friend wanted to abandon the car. I persuaded her to carry on driving in the middle of the road so that there would be less danger of mounting the pavement or finding ourselves crashing into some building or other. We still could not see anything ahead of us. Nothing except streaks of lightning followed by crashes of thunder. This was no primary-school task asking us to 'Describe a Storm'. This was the real thing, and there I was in mortal peril. All I could think of was that one of my sons was watching a football match at the Maracanã Stadium. And I kept wondering if all my relatives and friends were safely indoors. We finally reached home. Having struggled to control my nerves, I now gave way to panic and could not stop shivering. My friend, who was soaked to the skin, drank a little whisky. I tried to make

a telephone call and, as usual, could not get through (Dear Telephone Company, I implore you to give your customers better service because this telephone of mine has become an instrument of torture).

Soon afterwards, one of my sisters telephoned and reassured me that everyone was safely at home. I felt like telephoning all my friends to know if they, too, were safely indoors. I prayed that my son would come to no harm and could not imagine how he would get back in this weather. But suddenly I felt quite tranquil. I said to my friend: You can leave me now and I'll get some rest because I am dropping on my feet. She set off and it took her an hour to get from one end of Botafogo to the other. I left a note for my son. And took myself off to bed. I had put my trust in God.

WORDS FROM THE TYPEWRITER

I feel I have almost achieved my freedom. To the point of no longer needing to write. If I could, I would leave my space on this page blank: filled with the greatest silence. And readers, on seeing this blank space, would fill it with their own desires.

To be frank, this can scarcely be called a column. It is simply what it is. It does not correspond to any genre. Genre no longer interests me. What interests me is mystery. Is there some ritual attached to mystery? I believe there is. In order to adhere to the certainty of things. Meanwhile, I somehow already adhere to the earth. I am a daughter of nature: I want to hold things, feel them, touch them, I want to exist. And all this is part of a totality, of a mystery. I am but one being. Before there was a difference between the writer and me (or am I wrong? I cannot be certain). But no longer. I am but one being. And I leave you to be yourself. Does that frighten you? I believe it does. But it is worthwhile. Even if it hurts. For the pain soon passes.

And now I want to tell you about certain realities which leave me astonished. These refer to animals.

An acquaintance once told me that when you catch a crab by a claw, the claw comes away so that its body can escape. And a new claw soon grows to replace the one which has been discarded.

Another acquaintance was once staying with friends and she opened the fridge to get some iced water.

She saw something strange inside.

It was something white, stark white. Headless but breathing. Like a lung. Moving up and down, up and down. My friend got the fright of her life and slammed the door shut. And she stood there, paralysed, her heart pounding.

Then she discovered what it was. Her host was an experienced deep-sea diver. And he had caught a turtle. After removing its shell, he had cut the head off and put the turtle in the fridge, with the intention of cooking and eating it next day.

But until it was cooked, that headless, denuded turtle was in there wheezing away like bellows.

I have already written about turtles. I wrote the following:

'I have little or nothing to say about the sluggish turtle with that rock-hard shell on its back, covered in dust. This dinosaur which dates from the Tertiary Period is of no interest to me (when I called it a *dinosaur*, I did not know that I was right. I was merely guessing). I find the turtle exceedingly stupid. It does not relate to anything, not even to itself. It is an abstraction. Sexual contact between two turtles must be devoid of any warmth or life. And while I am no scientist, I can confidently predict that the species will disappear within the next few thousand years.'

I forgot to add that I find the turtle completely immoral.

An acquaintance of mine, suspecting that my lack of interest in turtles was insincere, loaned me a little book about them which was written in English. Here is an extract I have copied out:

'The turtle is any land or marine chelonian which is descended from a rare and ancient species of reptile. Its ancestors appeared for the first time two hundred thousand years ago, long before dinosaurs. While these large animals became extinct a long time ago, the turtle with its strange and ugly appearance, managed to survive and has remained relatively unchanged for at least the last one hundred and fifty thousand years.'

Without its shell, headless, and panting up and down. Alive.

How can one comprehend a turtle? How can one comprehend God?

The point of departure must surely be: 'I do not know'. Which means total surrender.

My typewriter carries on typing. It types out the following: Anyone who achieves a high level of abstraction has reached the frontiers of madness. Perhaps those great mathematicians and physicians might be able to confirm this. I know a great man who is very abstract but acts as if he were just like everyone else: he eats, drinks, sleeps with his wife and has children. In this way he prevents himself from turning into an X or a square root. When I recall that as a girl I used to give private tuition in Mathematics and Portuguese to other children, I can scarcely believe it. Because now I could not work out a square root to save myself. As for Portuguese, I used to get terribly bored explaining rules of grammar. Fortunately for me, I eventually forgot them. You have to know things in order to forget them. Only then can you start to breathe freely.

My typewriter is coming to a halt. Until next Saturday.

SEA-VOYAGE

Memorandum: One day I telephoned Rubem Braga, the master of the so-called *crônica* [an article or column in a newspaper] and confided in despair: 'Rubem, I am no columnist and what I am writing for the newspaper is becoming exceedingly personal. What am I to do?' He assured me: 'When you are writing for a newspaper, it is virtually impossible to avoid being personal.' But I don't want to tell people the story of my life. I have had a full life, rich in experiences and emotions, and the last thing I want to do is to write my autobiography. But here are my recollections of a sea-voyage.

I have made a number of sea-voyages in my time. And as I write, the memories come flooding back.

I made my first sea-voyage when I was less than two months old. We sailed from Hamburg to Recife: I do not know what means of transport my parents used in order to travel from the Ukraine, where I was born, to Hamburg, where my father tried to find work but, fortunately for all concerned, he was unsuccessful. I can remember nothing about this voyage which brought us to Brazil. No doubt we must have looked like those immigrants in the paintings of Lasar Segall.

But one sea-voyage I can remember was in the third-class section of an English ship sailing from Recife to Rio de Janeiro. It was terribly *exciting*. I did not know any English and chose my food by pointing a childish finger at the menu. On one sad occasion I ended up with a plate of haricot beans and nothing else. And to my annoyance I had to eat them. An unhappy choice. But such misfortunes befall us.

Another sea-voyage which comes to mind was from Genoa to Rio aboard a liner belonging to the Ita Shipping Company. My first child had just been born. I sincerely hope the Ita Company has long since improved its standards. The food was invariably stodgy and indigestible. I did everything possible to nourish my eight-month-old baby without endangering his health.

Then there was our voyage to New York. I was expecting my second child and heartbroken at having to leave Brazil. We travelled first class on an English liner and it was sheer luxury.

But I felt much too homesick to enjoy myself. I had a sixteen-year-old nanny called Avani with me to help with the baby. But her mind was on other things. She was thrilled with the voyage and amazed at the good fortune of diplomats. And so Avani, well-supplied with English books and rejoicing in her good fortune, showed no interest whatsoever in her charge. Avani felt she was destined for greater things. Never much of a cook, I rely on my imagination, and managed to teach Avani, who was soon preparing the most delicious chocolate soufflés. (One day I shall pass on the recipe. My friend San Tiago Dantas adored this soufflé which comes steaming hot from the oven and is eaten at once with lashings of cream on top.) Now then, this nanny of mine was a fast learner and studied me closely. She learned how to dress, acquired all the social graces and was forever reading books to improve her mind. One day, in an outburst of jealousy, she assured me that her photograph, too, would soon appear in all the newspapers. When my second child was born, Avani was convinced it could be nourished on coffee and milk and she could not believe her eyes when she saw me breast-feeding the infant. I subsequently hired a second girl to help me with the children, a Portuguese girl named Fernanda, who only left me when she married an American army colonel. We spent six and a half years in Washington. When we returned to Brazil, Avani remained behind and married an Englishman. She now lives in the style to which she always aspired. When I went to Texas to give a lecture and telephoned her in Washington, she pleaded with me: 'Do come and see me!' I explained: 'I am only here on a short visit and on limited funds.' Whereupon she insisted: 'Let me pay your fare. I can afford it!' My younger boy used to call her Ava instead of Avani. She adored the child and was delighted with her new name and so it stuck. And thereafter it was Ava here and Ava there.

I still have the certificate I was given when we crossed the Equator during that dispiriting voyage to New York. To mark the occasion one huge party was held on deck. Passengers were thrown into the swimming pool, some of them fully-dressed. As for me, I settled down with a glass of chilled extra dry champagne.

I cannot remember making any other sea-voyages. All my other trips have been by plane, my favourite means of transport. Flying gives me such a thrill. And I love the sense of danger. I am delighted to hear that there are now flights to Cabo Frio. And I intend to escape there for the odd weekend.

I must have travelled by train from the Ukraine to Romania and from there to Hamburg. But I shall never know, for I was an infant carried in my mother's arms.

But I can recall a memorable journey by train from Recife to Maceió. I was eleven years of age and accompanied by my father. I was tall for my years and looked much older. On the outward journey – which took almost a whole day – a most handsome eighteen-year-old youth, who had green eyes with heavy, dark eyelashes and who sucked one orange after another, boldly approached my father and asked if he could talk to me. My father gave his consent. I was overcome with excitement and we flirted for the rest of the journey under my father's distracted gaze.

In Maceió, where we only intended to spend one day, another surprise awaited me. A party had been arranged in my father's honour. Among those present was a thirteen-year-old boy who was something of a drop-out and was treated with suspicion. It was rumoured that on one occasion, when he was asked to accompany a lady home from a party, he had pinched her arm. Well, to cut a long story short, this boy took a fancy to me and asked me to go out with him. I was completely innocent, but instinctively sensed the risk and so I refused. He took my address in Recife and I subsequently received a postcard from him with a picture of flowers and words of love. I lost the postcard and lost his love. But the memory lingered. We returned to Recife the day after the party, and everyone came to see us off, including my admirer. I seem to remember that something else *bouleversante* happened. Alas, I have forgotten the details.

A RIDE ON A CAMEL, THE SPHINX AND A BELLY-DANCER

On one of my trips to Europe, the plane, for some reason never explained, had to make a detour. And quite unexpectedly, I found myself spending three days in Egypt. I first saw the Pyramids by night. I went there by car and the sky was pitch black. As I got out of the car I asked: But where are the Pyramids? They were only two metres away. An overwhelming apparition. By day, they seem less threatening. I also saw the Sahara desert in the daylight. The sands are not so much white as light yellow. There was a camel hirer on hand and for a pittance tourists could ride a camel. I sat between its two humps. It is the strangest creature and never stops chewing its food. I believe the camel has two stomachs or am I imagining things? I also saw the Sphinx. I could not decipher her meaning, nor could she decipher mine. We confronted each other as equals. She accepted me and I accepted her. Each with her own mystery.

In Morocco, I was invited to go and see the famous *belly-dance*. I could scarcely believe my eyes. Or my ears. The dancer was shaking her belly to the tune of: '*Mamá, yo quiero, mamá yo quiero mamar!*' ['Mummy I want, Mummy I want to suckle.']*

SPEAKING OF JOURNEYS

When I arrived at my hotel in Texas, I rang the Brazilian consul to tell him where I could be reached on the university campus should he need to contact me. Thank heavens I have forgotten the consul's name but he was certainly different from any other diplomat I have ever known. Feeling obliged to invite me to dinner, this official representative of Brazil took me to an inferior restaurant with tables covered in black and red check cloths. In the United States meat is expensive and fish is cheap. Before I could decide what I wanted to eat, my host said to the waiter: fish for the lady. I was taken aback because this was not a restaurant which specialized in fish. And before I could say a word,

* An old Carnival song associated with the late Carmen Miranda.

he added: And for me a thick, juicy steak. That is the gospel truth. He cut into his steak while I enviously looked on and then proceeded to tell me about the trials of being a divorced man. The fish, needless to say, was tasteless. To save him any further expense and to get rid of him as quickly as possible, I refrained from ordering any dessert.

On the campus itself, I was given a splendid room panelled throughout in wood and equipped with an enormous television set and air conditioning: I had only agreed to spend eight days there but no sooner had I arrived than I began to feel unbearably homesick and lonely. The university had organized a series of eight lectures followed by discussion. A word of warning to the Feminists: I was the only woman invited to give a lecture. But then Feminists are still in the minority. (And however much one may dislike it, one has to put up with it.) My lecture, which was to be the last in the series, was programmed for the Saturday. But I escaped at every possible opportunity. Before the closing ceremony with the usual long-winded speeches, I excused myself because the shops were still open and I wanted to buy some more toys for my children. I returned laden with parcels and had to buy another suitcase to carry them. It was like Christmas all over again when I finally arrived home. And I felt so relieved to be back. In some strange way, I could tell there would be a violent death in Texas: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. I could foresee that tragedy as I described the oppressive summer heat in Texas to friends and relatives: I just knew something dreadful was about to happen.

The teaching staff at the University of Texas were wonderful and frequently invited me to join them for *breakfast*, a common practice in the United States. There I met Gregory Rabassa, the well-known translator from Spanish and Portuguese, who was to translate my book *A maçã no escuro* [Apple in the Dark] published by Knopf in New York. Gregory, I never thanked you properly because I hate writing letters. I am deeply grateful. It was a labour of love. One thing, however, did puzzle me. In his survey of Brazilian literature with which he is more than familiar, Rabassa claims I am more difficult to translate than Guimarães Rosa, because of my *syntax*. I am not aware that there is anything very unusual about my syntax. I do not understand. But I am prepared to believe him. Gregory Rabassa must know what he is talking about.

With or without syntax, this is a true account of my travels.

I could tell you about Algiers, about Lisbon which I loved, about Paris, or Poland. Once in Poland, I could scarcely have been closer to Russia. I was offered a trip there but turned it down. Literally speaking, I have never stepped on Russian soil, for as an infant I was carried in my mother's arms. But I can remember one particular night in Poland at the home of one of the secretaries from the Brazilian Embassy. I walked out on to the balcony alone. A vast, dark forest stretched all the way to the Ukraine. Overcome with emotion, I could feel myself being summoned. Russia, too, was calling me. But Brazil is where I now belong.

I HAVE BEEN TO GREENLAND

When I accompanied Alzira Vargas Amaral Peixoto to Holland, where she had been invited to launch the oil-tanker which was to be named the *Getúlio Vargas*, we naturally broke our journey in Paris. We travelled in severe winter conditions with endless blizzards, and during the flight back to the United States our plane was forced to make a detour. At midnight, we suddenly found ourselves in Greenland. Alas, we were not allowed to leave the airport. The cold was unbelievable. Judging by the people around me, the inhabitants of Greenland are tall, slender and very fair. I suggested to Alzira: Let's pretend we visited the capital. She agreed. And so we told all our friends and acquaintances that we had been to Greenland. I fear I have broken my promise and given away our secret, Alzira...

A TRIP TO BOLAMA IN AFRICA

Because of another detour, I once unexpectedly found myself in the Portuguese colony of Bolama in Africa. There I had *breakfast* and saw the Africans. The Portuguese, at least the ones I came into contact with, treated the Negroes with the utmost cruelty. The Negroes in Bolama speak the most extraordinary Portuguese. I asked an eight-year-old boy his age. He replied fifty-three years old. I was taken aback. When a Portuguese friend joined me for *breakfast*, I asked him what on earth the child was talking about. He told me: the natives here have no notion of age. You can ask that old man over there his age and he will tell

you he is two years old. I then asked him: Is it really necessary to treat them as if they were animals? He argued that it was the only way to get them to work. I remained lost in thought. Mysterious Africa. At this very moment there is indomitable Africa still very much alive. I weep for Africa. How I should love to be able to do something to help her. But I have no power. My only weapon is the written word. And even then, only sometimes.

UNTITLED

How could anyone have dared to say that I vegetate rather than live? Just because I lead my life away from the limelight. I of all people, I who live life to the full. And who could be closer to the ineffable? I breathe God with my whole being. And I live many lives. I shall not attempt to enumerate all the other lives I live. But I can feel all of them and they are all breathing. I also live the lives of those dear to me who are now dead. They are constantly in my thoughts. I am at the very heart of this mystery. At times my soul writhes with pain. A friend of mine suffers from gall-stones. And whenever a stone is trying to pass, she suffers the agonies of hell until it is finally dislodged. The gall-stones I suffer from are spiritual, and until they pass, I, too, writhe with pain. And when they are finally dislodged, I suddenly feel purified. It simply is not true to say that people cannot be helped. The mere presence of another human being gives me reassurance. I find consolation in the bitter-sweet memory of someone whom I once loved. And I am reassured by my own breathing. And there are moments of amusement and laughter. Moments of sheer joy. Someone once wrote to me: I would abandon you for God. That I can understand. Could it be that that person is now ready to abandon me and exchange me for God? Or is that person missing me? I believe that person still misses me but at certain moments is possessed by God. Even as I write, my silence is pure. And how consoling to write: the stone is passing at last. I surrender completely to such moments. And I embrace my own death. I have already started to long with all my heart for those whom I shall abandon. I feel so unburdened. Nothing weighs upon me. For I am experiencing something mysterious. Eternity precedes and follows me. The symbol of this mystery can be found in Vila Velha in Paraná. Vila Velha existed before men came to Earth. The silence must have been profound in that uninhabited age. The mute strength of time which has always existed. Time is permanent. Never-ending. Such a pleasant thought! I also possess another stone which is even older. Geologists have reached the conclusion that it dates back to the time of the Earth's formation. Brazil is very ancient and its

volcanoes are already extinct. (I have momentarily interrupted my writing to pick up that stone and feel it in my hand.) I also own a small diamond: it looks like a crystal drop resting in the palm of my hand. I experience the greatest temptations and most insistent desires. To overcome them, I spend forty days in the wilderness. There is a glass of water within reach. From time to time I take a sip, thus quenching all my thirsts. I am now about to explain a Hindu rite which people follow to attain tranquillity. It may sound nonsensical but it actually works. You do the following: Try to visualize a bunch of white roses. Try to imagine that soft, perfumed whiteness. Then think of those deep red roses of the Black Prince variety which evoke passion. Then try to imagine a bunch of yellow roses which I earlier described as a joyful surprise. Then picture a bunch of pink roses in all their modesty, with those heavy, velvety petals. Then mentally put all those roses together to form one enormous bouquet. And finally, you remove the pink ones, perhaps because they are so modest and quintessentially rose, and mentally replace them in the flower-bed in the garden. The Hindus achieve peace with this spiritual exercise. I often think about India, which I shall probably never visit. But starvation itself does not nourish anyone's soul. Only self-imposed starvation. It is four in the morning and raining outside. The wind is rattling the doors which lead on to the terrace. But I feel warm inside. I ought to be feeling cold, but I am warm and alive. This afternoon I have a most important engagement. I have a deep regard for the person I am going to meet. And that person greatly respects me. Perhaps we shall meet in silence. A parcel arrived from Minas Gerais: inside there was a portrait of me, and the man who sent it swore he loved me with unspoken ardour. I replied, pointing out that all ardour is silent. And I thanked him for making me the object of his affections. His portrait is excellent. I cannot help wondering whether this man was introduced to me when I paid a visit to Belo Horizonte to give a lecture. His portrait is more faithful than any photograph. And then there is the mysterious Gilberto. This Gilberto who sent me a sketch in which I am standing with a cigarette in one hand. On the left-hand side, Gilberto has listed the titles of all my books with a tiny drawing to match each title. And on the right-hand side he has written: *Beautiful! Irresistible! Fatale!* Gilberto, I must remind you that *femmes fatales* only exist in silent films made in Hollywood. Your sketch is excellent, too. Have you met me in person, Gilberto? Forgive me if I have

forgotten our meeting. You only signed your letter 'Gilberto', and put no address on the back of the envelope, which is why I am replying here in my column.

In order to ensure that my encounter this afternoon is a success, I shall get all dressed up and perfume myself. And if we should speak, it would be with words of joy. Which perfume shall I use? I think I have decided. But that is my secret. I never reveal the names of the perfumes I use. I can remember my father always commenting on my perfume. My children also have their perfume. God's gift to the human body. A gift for which I am humbly grateful. And perhaps one day I will go to India. I shall ask the bank to loan me sufficient money to go and spend a week there. Will I have the courage to travel alone? So long as I have the address of someone living there who will be able to act as a guide. How I should love to visit India...But I must stop now otherwise I shall overrun the space I am allowed. I shall settle down to some reading. An article about diamonds in an Italian magazine. The author who writes says: 'The diamond is the most beautiful and desirable of all precious stones and everyone's idea of what a precious stone should be.')*

* 'Tra le pietre preziose è la più bella, la più ricercata, è l'idea stessa di pietra preziosa.'

A VISIT FROM XICO BUARK

This spelling of Chico Buarque was invented by Millôr Fernandes one evening during a party which was held at Antonio's Restaurant. This reminded me of how I used to love playing word-games even as a little girl. As for Chico, he simply gave a big, big smile for two reasons: one because he found it amusing, two because he always wears that sad, mechanical grin of someone who has been *defeated* by fame. If Xico Buark does not quite harmonize with the innocent and rather melancholy image of Chico, it harmonizes with this ability of his to attract the attention of others and then respond when they call him, with his ability to grin while keeping those green eyes of his wide open and unsmiling. He is no longer a boy, but if there ever existed in the animal kingdom a creature at once thoughtful, handsome and eternally youthful, that creature-cum-boy would be called Francisco Buarque de Holanda.

I took such a liking to Chico that I invited him to my home. He accepted without a moment's hesitation.

He arrived at about four o'clock: at five he had a music lesson with Vilma Graça and for the past year he had been studying Musical Theory before learning to play the piano.

As for the decisive moments in his career, he is still far too young to know if those moments were decisive or not. He was born with a star on his forehead: everything came to him as easily and naturally as a stream flowing from a rock. Creating music costs him little effort. Periodically, when he is trying to compose something he falls asleep thinking about it and wakes up still thinking about it – but nothing happens. Until he gets tired of trying and gives up. Next day the music explodes, giving the impression that it is gratuitous and born there and then. But that explosion comes from the unconscious labour beforehand, which was to all appearances so fruitless.

The problem intrigues him: so much so that he asked me several questions about my own method of working. I said to him: 'You may have lived all your life in a large city and have had a good education, but you still give the impression of being surprised that you can surprise others with your individual voice.'

Then I asked him: 'Have you still not got used to success? For you still give the impression of being overwhelmed by your own talent. That you have been caught up in the whirlwind of success and have not yet come down to earth.'

Chico thinks he must look a fool, because his reactions are so very slow, but deep down he is very astute. Except that coming down to earth in a practical sense bothers him somewhat. He finds that success is one of those external factors which do nothing for him. A fellow can feel pleased with himself and rejoice in his success but this is not important. What is important is the suffering endured by the person who seeks and finds. This morning, he confided, I woke up with the most terrible feeling of emptiness because yesterday I finished my latest composition.

We discussed Vila-Lobos' method of composing music and he quoted an anecdote passed on by Tom Jobim. One day Vila-Lobos was working at home amidst the most awful din. Tom asked the composer: 'Maestro, how can you work with this noise?' And Vila-Lobos replied: 'What I hear on the outside bears no relation to what I hear in my head.' And that was something Chico envied. Chico would also prefer not to be constantly meeting music publishers' deadlines and to be less in the public eye. Nowadays he is waylaid even on the street by fans requesting autographs.

Chico seems such a *nice fellow*, the type of man all mothers with unmarried daughters would like to have for a son-in-law. His charm combines generosity with good humour, melancholy with sincerity. He has an innocent expression but insists he is simply very lazy.

He was naturally delighted when Maestro Isaac Karabtchevsky conducted *A Banda* [The Band] in the Teatro Municipal, but the thing which gives him the greatest satisfaction of all is actually composing music. He has been writing little verses since childhood. I asked him to write some verses for me, and to put him at his ease I moved into the kitchen while he set to work with pencil and paper. After several minutes, a jubilant Chico called me back into the room. The verses were ready: To please Clarice / An awkward verse or two / She sat in the kitchen / To allow me to think / But I could see her watching me / more frightening than the Day of Judgement.*

* Como Clarice pedisse / Um versinho que eu não disse / Me dei mal / Ficou lá dentro esperando / Mas deixou seu olho olhando / Com cara de Juízo Final.

I asked him whether he had ever tried to find solitude or if he had always been surrounded by all this furore. I advised him to seek solitude from time to time, otherwise he would find himself being submerged, for even the excessive love of others can submerge a human being. He agreed wholeheartedly and told me he took every opportunity to escape.

No sooner had he embarked on his studies in the School of Architecture than he exchanged his T-square for a guitar. His family were outraged and told him he was behaving irresponsibly. But they gradually came round to accepting the situation.

When we spoke, he was going through an experimental phase and the previous day he had put the final touches to a piece of music to be performed without words, a composition which had taken him quite some time to finish. But when it came to writing a new song, he was always in the mood. The most important things in Chico's life are work and love. As a human being he must have his freedom to work and love. Jokingly, I asked him what he meant by love. 'I don't know how to define it', he answered before asking: 'How would you define it?' 'I'm not so sure myself', was all I could say.

IN AMICABLE CONVERSATION WITH TOM JOBIM (I)

Tom Jobim sponsored me at the First Festival of Brazilian Writers where I launched my novel *A maça no escuro* [Apple in the Dark]. There he was at our stand, cracking jokes as he held up my book and called out:

– Get your copy here. Come and buy your copy here before we're sold out!

And surprisingly enough, all the copies were sold.

Some time ago, Tom paid me a visit. We had not seen each other for years. He was still the same Tom: handsome, endearing, and with that innocent expression on his face, his hair hanging half-way down over his forehead. We drank a whisky and the conversation became more serious. Here is a verbatim account of our conversation. Tom had no objection to my taking notes.

– Tom, how do you cope with the problem of growing old?

– There is a verse by Carlos Drummond de Andrade which says: *Maturity is an awesome boon... [A madureza, esta horrível prenda...]*. I really don't know, Clarice. You become more experienced but also more demanding.

– No bad thing, if one makes the right demands.

– With age, you become aware of many things which did not seem to matter before. Even your most spontaneous instincts pass through a filter. You find yourself examining the world around you more closely. I have noticed that music is changing, with new channels of communication. People can no longer be bothered attending concerts at the Teatro Municipal. But let me ask you a question about people's reading habits, for nowadays everyone prefers to watch television or listen to pop music on their transistor radios. Any really serious music I have ever written is stored away in a drawer. Don't misunderstand me: I take popular music seriously. But do people read as much today? As a boy, I never went to bed without a book to read before falling asleep. People seem to have so little time for reading these days and I suspect that before long we shall have instant literature. What do you think?

– I should hate to see that happen. It would distress me to think that people could read my books in a flash. After writing

them with so much loving care and painstaking research, the least I expect from my readers is genuine interest and their wholehearted attention. The kind of interest and attention you have always shown, Tom. And yet the funny thing is that I myself no longer have the patience to read fiction.

– But surely that's something of a contradiction, Clarice?

– Not at all, because fortunately for me, my books are not overloaded with events, but rather the repercussions of those events on the characters. There are those who even believe that music and literature will become extinct. Do you know who said that? Henry Miller. I'm not sure whether he meant in our time or within the next three to five hundred years. But I'm convinced that music and literature will survive.

Tom laughed heartily.

– I couldn't agree more!

– I'm convinced that every human being needs to hear music. Words, whether spoken or written, are akin to music. And music and literature are two of the most uplifting things mankind possesses. Music and literature raise us above the kingdom of apes and mere animal existence.

– Presumably above mineral and vegetable existence as well! (Another hearty laugh.) For I think of myself as being a composer who believes in words. Only yesterday I re-read two of your stories: *O búfalo* [The Buffalo] and *A imitação da rosa* [The Imitation of the Rose].

– Yes, but sometimes words can be death.

– Death doesn't exist, Clarice. I once had an experience which made me aware of this. Just as the *I* does not exist, either with a small or capital *I*. Apart from that experience which I won't discuss here, I walk in constant fear of death. The death of the *I*, I swear to you, Clarice, for that is something I have witnessed.

– Do you believe in reincarnation?

– I don't know. The Hindus say that only those who are conscious of the various lives they have lived are capable of understanding reincarnation. Obviously, that is not how I see it: if reincarnation exists, it can only be attained through dispossession.

I then showed Tom the epigraph from one of my books, a phrase borrowed from Bernard Berenson, the art critic and historian: 'A complete life may be one ending in so full an identification with the non-self that there is no self to die.'

– That is beautifully expressed – said Tom – and dispossession

in its truest form. I fell into a trap because, without the *I*, I have negated myself. If we negate any passing from one *I* to another, which is the same as reincarnation, then we negate reincarnation itself.

– I don't really understand this conversation but it seems to make sense. How can we speak of things we do not understand! Let's wait and see if we meet up again in the next reincarnation.

IN AMICABLE CONVERSATION WITH TOM JOBIM (II)

We then discussed the problem of industrialized societies where excessive organization can lead to depersonalization. And we asked ourselves if it were not the responsibility of artists to safeguard the happiness and conscience of mankind.

– I'm opposed to consumer art. Naturally, Clarice, I am as much a consumer as anyone else... But the moment standardization takes the joy out of living, I'm opposed to industrialization. I can see the advantages of any technology which makes life easier but I have no desire whatsoever to see the machine dominate man. Of course it is up to artists to safeguard the happiness of mankind. Even though art is so alienated at present and only brings sadness into the world. After all, artists are not to blame if their role is to reflect the world. Art is a true and honest reflection of the world. Long live Oscar Niemeyer and Vila-Lobos! Long live Clarice Lispector! Long live Antônio Carlos Jobim! Our art is an expression of dissent. I have symphonies and chamber music in my head which refuse to come to the surface.

– Don't you think it is your duty to compose the music your soul demands? From what you are saying, it would seem that our best work is addressed to the élite.

– Obviously, in order to express ourselves we must have recourse to the language of the élite, an élite which doesn't exist in Brazil...That is the great tragedy of Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Vila-Lobos.

– Then tell me, Tom, for whom are we being creative, you with your music and me with my books?

– I don't believe any demands have been made on us in this respect. Out of the blue I began to hear music and you to hear words, which we learned from no one. Neither of us had any choice. We both work from inspiration. Plaster of Paris is made from rough clay. Rough even for us. The criticism I would make, Clarice, as we sit in this comfortable apartment here in Leme, is that we have become two rarefied human beings who only have something to give at certain moments. Artists really ought to give more of themselves all the time and without discrimination. Nowadays, when I study a score by Stravinsky I feel an

even more irrepressible desire to be with the people, although as Carlos Drummond de Andrade once put it 'the culture you throw out of the window comes crawling back through the front door'.

– Perhaps our problem is that we all belong to a failed generation?

– I couldn't disagree more.

– The way I see it, we have arrived on the threshold of an open door – and because we are scared or whatever, we cannot bring ourselves to cross that threshold. Even though our name is engraved there. Each of us has a door with our name engraved on it, Tom, and only by crossing the threshold will those who are lost be able to enter and find themselves.

– Knock and it shall be opened unto you.

– I must confess, Tom, that if I had had the courage I should already have crossed that threshold at the risk of being accused of madness. For there exists a new language, both in music and in literature, and we have both passed through those narrow doors which beckoned us. All I am trying to say is that we were both born with a vocation to fulfil. How do you set about composing a piece of music? I am getting things out of order but that is not entirely my fault, or yours, Tom. Somehow this conversation has become almost psychedelic.

– I feel compelled to compose music. My need for freedom expresses itself in my music.

– Inner or external freedom?

– Total freedom. If as a man I was nothing but a petit bourgeois who conformed, as an artist I took my revenge in expansive love. No more whisky, thank you. I am so greedy that I prefer to drink beer to fill this great void in my soul. Or at least to avoid getting drunk too soon. I only drink on the rare occasion. I enjoy a glass of beer but I hate being drunk. Just as well the maid remembered to provide some beer.

IN AMICABLE CONVERSATION WITH TOM JOBIM (III)

– Tom, anyone as well-known as you are is a complete stranger at heart. Which is your hidden side?

– Music. The field was competitive and it was a question of eliminating one's colleagues and friends in order to survive. The spectacle of the world struck me as being false. My piano in that dark room held out the possibility of infinite harmony. There is my hidden side. My need to escape, my shyness, unexpectedly led me against my will to the spotlights of Carnegie Hall. I have always tried to avoid the limelight, Clarice, just as the Devil flees the Crucifix. I have always tried to keep in the wings. When I would return from the beach, the piano seemed to offer an unsuspected world of endless freedom, all the notes were at my disposal and I could see vistas opening up before me, saw that everything was permissible, and that I was free to go wherever I pleased without any restrictions. I felt like an adolescent awakening to love for the very first time. My vague, uncertain dream had suddenly become real. Do you know what I mean, Clarice? Did you know the flower doesn't know it's a flower? I lost and found myself, while catching a glimpse of the housemaid's breasts through the keyhole. Her breasts looked marvellous when spied through the keyhole.

– Tom, improvise a little poem which might be set to music.

Tom agreed and after a short pause, he dictated the following:

> Your eyes are wider than the sea.
> Were I ever to possess your strength
> I would despise and abandon you.
> Or perhaps love you all the more.
> How I long for what might have been!*

– How do you feel when a song is about to be born?

– The birth pangs are unbearable. Beating one's head against the wall, anguish, the futility of what is essential, are all the

* Teus olhos verdes são maiores que o mar. / Se um dia eu fosse tão forte quanto você / eu te desprezaria e viveria no espaço. / Ou talvez então eu te amasse. / Ai! que saudades me dá da vida que nunca tive!

symptoms of something new coming into existence. The less I have to tamper with a piece of music the more I like it. The slightest hint of *savoir faire* upsets me.

– Gauguin, who is not my favourite artist, said something we should never forget, however much his words may disturb us. Here is the advice he gave: 'If your right hand is dextrous, paint with your left and once your left hand becomes dextrous, paint with your feet.' Is that what you mean when you say you are wary of *savoir-faire*?

– A certain facility can be extremely useful, but in the final analysis it counts for little. It is only from being creative that the artist derives any satisfaction. True or false, I prefer an awkward form which says something to a skilful one which says nothing.

– Do you choose your performers and collaborators?

– Whenever possible, I choose my own collaborators. But success came all too quickly. I prefer to collaborate with people whom I admire, such as Vinícius de Moraes, Chico Buarque, João Gilberto and Nílton Mendonça. And what about you?

– As a writer I always work on my own without any collaborators. Every time I finish writing a book or short story, I have the sinking feeling that I shall never write anything again. What sort of feeling do you get once you have given life to a song?

– I feel exactly the same. I always feel close to death once those birth pangs have passed.

The maid arrived with our beer.

– The most important thing in this world is love, the most important thing for any individual is his or her spiritual integrity, even if that person appears to be contaminated on the surface. When that person says yes, he or she means yes, when they say no, they mean no. And one can sleep amidst all the uproar. Come hell or high water. As for the meaning of love, love is to give oneself, to give oneself, to give oneself. Not to give oneself in accordance with one's own *I* – for lots of people think they are giving themselves when, in fact, they are not giving anything – but in accordance with the *I* of the person one loves. Those who give nothing of themselves truly detest and emasculate themselves. Love on its own simply makes no sense.

– Has there been some decisive moment in your life?

– There have been nothing but decisive moments in my life. Not to mention being persuaded to tour the United States, me of all people, who in those days loved nothing better than loafing

around in striped pyjamas and relaxing in a wicker rocking-chair beneath a clear blue sky.

– Anything creative, whatever the medium, usually reveals three stages: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Do you sense this in your own songs? Think hard.

– I feel it very strongly. I am a committed mathematician, who lacks both commitment and mathematics. Without form there is nothing. There is chaos even in form.

– What have been the great emotional experiences of your life as a composer and in your private life?

– As a composer, none. In my private life, the discovery of the *I* and the *non-I*.

– What kind of Brazilian music is proving to be most popular abroad?

– All Brazilian music. In Europe and in the United States, inspiration, strength and vitality seem to have dried up in popular music. Here in Brazil, despite all our political and social ills, there is still a wonderful sense of spiritual freedom. And this is conducive to those moments of inspiration which the artist needs in order to be creative.

A CASE OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY

A young girl once told me about a curious occurrence. I asked her to put it in writing just as she had narrated it and without trying to impose any literary style. All I needed was a brief memo which I could subsequently use for a short story.

The girl got out her writing pad and sat in a corner of my sitting-room, almost with her back to me. In the meantime I lay back in my chair thinking and receiving impressions, waiting and watching out of the corner of one eye as her hand moved swiftly to and fro across the page. As she wrote, I mentally traced out my story from beginning to end.

She paused and told me: – I don't know how to continue.

Then, as if I had already seen what she had written, I read out to her the most important bits.

Shortly the girl announced: – It's ready, let me read it to you because my handwriting isn't very clear.

As I listened, my eyes opened wide with surprise: here was the story I was hoping to write myself. It was almost as if I myself had developed the story as she was writing!

I interrupted her to say:

– But you've written the story in my very own words! The story is ready! What a strange coincidence!

The girl replied:

– While I was writing I had the distinct impression that you were dictating to me and that all I was doing was copying out your words. Everything came so easily.

Her style could not have been influenced by me because she confessed that she had only read a few pages of one of my books before giving up because she felt too moved to carry on reading. Besides, we had not known each other for very long...

This was a clear case of parapsychology where the girl became my medium.

Even as I narrate this true episode I am still puzzled. The mystery of human relationships intrigues me.

THE FOURTH PSALM OF DAVID

Hear me when I call, oh God of my righteousness: Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me and hear my prayer. Oh ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after falsehood? Know that the Lord hath shown me His wondrous love: the Lord will hear when I call unto Him. Stand in awe and sin not: though ye lie abed resentful, do not break silence. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put thy trust in the Lord. There are many who say, 'If only we might prosper again'. Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than when there was corn and wine in plenty. Now I will lie down in peace, and sleep: for Thou alone, oh Lord, makest me to dwell in safety.

DISCORDANCE

I give you bread but you prefer gold. I give you gold but what you are really hungering after is bread.

LIVING

He had the sensation of existing. He was profound, lucid and experienced, yet he could not explain it. That sensation of existing was a clear, tranquil and instantaneous vision of being the very agent of life and death. Thereafter, he resisted sleep in order not to lose the sensation of being alive.

TIME TO PAUSE

I yearn for myself. I am not sufficiently withdrawn, I spend far too much time on the telephone, I write much too quickly, live at too fast a pace. Where can I find *myself*?

I must make a spiritual retreat and find myself at last – yet I am so afraid – of myself.

YOU ARE SIMPLY A NUMBER

If you are not careful you will find yourself becoming just another number. Because from the moment you are born you are classified with a number. Your identity in the Félix Pacheco is a number. You are a number on the Civil Register. You are a number on the electoral roll. Professionally speaking, you are also a number. To drive a car, you need a licence with a number, and a plate with your registration number. The Inland Revenue identifies tax-payers with a number. The building where you live, your telephone, your apartment – all require a number.

If you open a bank account, the teller identifies you with a number. The same is true if you own property. If you are a member of some club, they give you a number. If you are elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, your chair has a number.

This is why I have decided to arrange for some private lessons in Mathematics. I must learn more about such things. Or perhaps some lessons in Physics. I am not joking: I really do intend to study Mathematics, I must know something about integral calculus.

If you are in business, the number of your trading licence must be displayed above the front door of your premises.

If you contribute to some charity, you have a number on their mailing list. If you book a holiday or business trip, the travel agent gives you a reservation number. If you book a flight, you are given a number. If you possess shares, you also receive a number as a company shareholder. And needless to say, you have a number on the polling register. If you are a Roman Catholic, you receive a number at baptism. In the archives of church and registry offices you have a number. If you own a firm or run a business, you have a number And when you die, your grave is numbered. Not forgetting your death certificate.

Have we become nobodies? I really must protest. But it is useless complaining. And just you wait and see: even my complaint will be numbered.

A friend of mine told me that in the Alto Sertão of Pernambuco a woman took her child, who was seriously ill and suffering from dehydration, to the nearest Health Centre. And she was

handed a slip of paper with the number ten. But the doctor only had time to see nine patients before the surgery closed. That child was deprived of treatment because of a number. And we are to blame.

If there is a war, you are classified with a number. Unless I am mistaken, they attach a metal disc to your wrist. Or hang it from a chain round your neck.

We must put a stop to this. We must insist on being individuals without any number. Being oneself is simply being oneself.

After all, God does not have a number.

Let us be people, for Heaven's sake. Society is trying to make us as soulless as a number, as arid as a bone bleached white by the sun. My private number is nine. Nothing more. Eight. Nothing more. Seven. Nothing more. Without adding them up or converting them into nine hundred and eighty-seven. Am I classifying myself with a number? Not at all. Intimacy forbids it. How often I have tried to avoid having any number but without success. And so we need a lot of affection, a name of our own and the right to be ourselves. And let us make love because love has no number. Or perhaps it has?

MYSTERY: HEAVEN

I can no longer remember when it was that my father took me to Caxambu. One evening I went with another girl who was rather withdrawn and silent to a somewhat lonely spot. Once there, I found myself looking up at the sky. The sky in the open countryside is a deep marine blue and you can see thousands of stars like tiny crystals. Gazing up at that sky I felt quite dizzy.

Dazzled by human genius. How did they come to invent the planetarium?

On the twenty-fifth of July 1971, I went to see the sky in the planetarium. It was a Sunday. And on this particular Sunday they were showing Jupiter in great detail. The sky must have been created by a madman or a genius. It gave me so much pleasure to be able to examine the Sun. And the sign on that day was Sagittarius, which happens to be my sign. Jupiter is the most powerful of all the planets. It has a number of satellites.

After the fifteenth of August I am going back to see the planet Mars. I wonder if any of the planets are inhabited besides the Earth? We are privileged. We have so much primary matter left

over that we even have animals: animals as pure as the tiger and as horrid as one animal I would rather not mention even in writing.

I am convinced we ought to be more united: because the Universe is so enormous that it surpasses all horizons. Unless we learn to love each other we are lost. And better still, if we can find each other in God.

I AM A QUESTION

Who asked the first question?
Who made the world?
If it was God, who made God?
Why do two and two make four?
Who spoke the first word?
Who wept for the first time?
Why is the Sun hot?
Why is the Moon cold?
Why do lungs breathe?
Why do we die?
Why do we love?
Why do we hate?
Who made the first chair?
Why are clothes washed?
Why do women have breasts?
Why do they have milk?
Why does sound exist?
Why does silence exist?
Why does time exist?
Why is there space?
Why is there the infinite?
Why do I exist?
Why do you exist?
Why does sperm exist?
Why does the ovum exist?
Why does the panther have eyes?
Why do people go wrong?
Why do we read?
Why does the square root exist?
Why are there flowers?
Why does the element earth exist?
Why do people want to sleep?
Why have I lit a cigarette?
Why does the element fire exist?
Why does the river exist?
Why do women become pregnant?

Why were spectacles invented?
Why does illness exist?
Why does health exist?
Why am I asking questions?
Why do I puzzle my readers?
Why is the Swedish language so easy on the ear?
Why did I go to a cocktail party at the Swedish Embassy?
Why is the Swedish cultural attaché's first name Stig?
Why am I alive?
Why are my readers alive?
Why am I feeling drowsy?
Why are men given prizes and awards?
Why do women love men?
Why do men have the strength to love women?
Why is there integral calculus?
Why do I write?
Why did Christ die on the cross?
Why do I tell lies?
Why do I tell the truth?
Why does the hen exist?
Why do publishers exist?
Why do we have money?
Why did I paint a glass jar matt black?
Why do we have sex?
Why do I search for things without finding them?
Why is there anonymity?
Why do saints exist?
Why does one pray?
Why does one grow old?
Why does cancer exist?
Why do people join each other for dinner?
Why is the Italian language so amorous?
Why do people sing?
Why does the black race exist?
Why am I not black?
Why does one man murder another?
Why is a child being born this very minute?
Why are the Jews the chosen people?
Why is my surname as hard as a diamond?
Why is today Saturday?
Why am I the mother of two sons?
Why could I go on asking questions indefinitely?

Why does liver taste like liver?
Why does my maid have a boyfriend?
Why is Parapsychology a science?
Why do I want to study Mathematics?
Why are some things soft and others hard?
Why am I hungry?
Why is there famine in the North-east?
Why does one word lead to another?
Why do politicians make speeches?
Why is the machine becoming so important?
Why do I have to pause to ask questions?
Why does the colour bottle-green exist?
Why?
Because, that's why.
But why did you not tell me before?
Why farewell?
Why until next Saturday?
Why?

AN APOLOGY, CLARIFICATION AND CHANGE OF HEART

Today I want to say something about the article I wrote entitled: 'You are simply a number' which appeared on Saturday 7 August. And I am writing with the utmost urgency to clarify certain matters.

I somehow unmistakably sensed that I might have caused offence by what I wrote. It offended even me. And I realized almost immediately that it must have offended others. No. You are not simply a number. Nor am I.

For certain things are enigmatic. Love is not a number. Neither is friendship. Or sympathy. Elegance is something indefinable. And as to whether God has a number – I really do not know. Hope, too, has no number. Losing things is also inexplicable: I can never remember where I have put them. I even lose the lists I draw up of things I must not lose. Death is ineffable. And also life. Existence, too, is fleeting and intangible. As well as reputation. And the creative mind.

What I am writing may suggest a labyrinth but it is a labyrinth with a wide entrance and exit. A little girl named Clarice once gave me a very pretty picture of a green labyrinth. Quite mysterious. Last Sunday I saw a green parrot which was making noises and trying to imitate human speech. Also mysterious. And the fact that I have just finished writing a story entitled 'Labirinto' [The Labyrinth] is no less mysterious. Clarice and Clarice understand each other.

Let me explain why I am having private lessons in Mathematics. It is just that everything appears to be so insoluble. Therefore I am trying to find ways and means of arriving at solutions. I must have solutions. I hate leaving things in mid-air. Hence my gratitude to the reader who sent me the following letter on the tenth of August. I am transcribing it word for word:

'Last Saturday, after reading your column entitled: "You are simply a number" in the *Jornal do Brasil* [Brazilian News], I felt that I must write to you and defend the use of numbers. I hope you will not take offence or think me presumptuous. Please read what I have to say.'

There is a long pause at this point before the letter goes on:

'Why are you so worried about numbers? You do not exist by virtue of the number on your identity card, however much you may need that number. You exist by virtue of words and thoughts. Nor do you measure your words or count your thoughts. No one takes count of the blood flowing in your veins. And a knowledge of Mathematics is not really essential. You already know so much more than Mathematics can ever teach you. Because you love things which are beautiful and Beauty cannot be divided. Beauty is integral even though it exists in various forms.

You walk through bright and open meadows and are able to touch the impalpable. So why concern yourself with numbers which can offer nothing to enhance your life?

Let your number exist without confusing it with your own existence because that number cannot nourish your spirit.'

The letter has been typed with the sender's Christian name in typescript underneath. I prefer not to reveal the name just in case it is attributed to the wrong person.

I must ask your forgiveness. With all my heart. The very air we breathe is indescribable: as indescribable as my reaction when I read your letter. Rather than strike a sour note, I shall put the following in parentheses (the keys of your typewriter are in need of a good clean. They are almost as dirty as the keys on mine. And your typescript is scarcely legible).

To continue: Dear unknown reader, I am now putting the final touches to my latest book. It is as hard as a diamond. It even sparkles periodically. And it is only in the closing pages that I introduce a note of benevolence, indignation and acceptance.

And as I prepare to write a story for children entitled: *A vida íntima de Laura* [The Secret Life of Laura] – Laura, by the way, is a hen – I shall need to take a little rest and tone down any glint in my eye or harshness in my voice. For one has to be gentle, so very gentle, when speaking to children. I shall simply relax. And try to speak slowly. And tell my story about the hen at my leisure. There are moments of joy and sadness in this story. And one or two surprises. Can't you see how I have already become more gentle?

THREE MEETINGS MAKE FOUR

It was a sad meeting. I had not seen this person for ages. I was shocked: this person's soul had withered and it dangled there,

betraying no sorrow. I tried as best I could to revive it with the kiss of life as one does with somebody rescued from drowning. But this person had no desire to be saved. He goes on being a *splendid* fellow of unblemished reputation. Yet he is lost. It is important that he should find himself. Only then will he begin to experience any feelings.

The second meeting could not have been briefer: we took the same lift. I had not seen this person for months. And what I saw pleased me: this person was weary but leading an active life.

The third meeting – as in *The Three Musketeers* who are, in fact, four – was a double meeting. I bumped into the two daughters of Aluísio and Solange Magalhães. One of them is called after me, and having a chat with her greatly amuses me. It is like having the perfect dialogue. She made me a gift of two of her drawings and on the back she had written: 'For Clarice from Clarice.' And there was a fourth musketeer called Carolina. These girls are everything one could hope for in children: transparent and pure, creative, affectionate and natural. It was a happy meeting.

A FLEETING MOMENT

I was walking through a crowded thoroughfare when a *hippie* came towards me on the same side of the road. He looked at me, at first vaguely, and then, as if surprised, began staring at me. Then he laughed. So I laughed back. He gave me a signal to stop. But I was in a hurry and had other matters on my mind, so I kept on walking. But having spotted each other from a distance and having got a good look at each other as we drew closer, this had been a genuine meeting.

Why did we laugh? We laughed at this encounter which was one of happiness. And also at this crazy world of ours.

I can imagine that if I had stopped, I would have said, Hey! And he would have replied: Hey! Or like an American *hippie* he would have greeted me with *Wow!* And then asked me: *And who's this?* And I'd have answered: *I'm me.* He would then have asked me: What's your name? Your number? And I would have told him: My number is Clarice. What's yours? And he would have told me. No doubt it would have turned out to be Johnny. He looked like a Johnny.

Johnny, I'll never forget you. Not as long as I live. For we were immortal at that moment. It was only a moment but sufficient for both of us to pass a comment on the world and on ourselves. Johnny became my brother.

I am sure this particular *hippie* did not smoke marijuana. Like me, he was given to moments of ecstasy. For there are people who already have LSD in their makeup without ever touching the stuff. Johnny, you and I belong to the same clan. And like me, Johnny felt the need to make the world one big family. But why were you so surprised to see me, Johnny? You must have known of my existence. Forgive me if I walked on when you asked me to stop. It just was not possible.

How unlike the experience I had recently. I was travelling in a taxi which stopped at a red light. There was another taxi alongside mine and the driver could not have been more than thirty. He had a passenger in the back seat. I was staring into space and oblivious to the fact that I was staring at the driver of the other taxi. He began staring back and all of a sudden gave

me a wink. I turned my eyes away. It was rather like a silent film. And so banal (I don't mean silent films themselves). Not that the taxi-driver had given any offence. But he had been so flirtatious. And had tried to make me appear flirtatious, too. And that was something I could not forgive.

Whereas Johnny had made me feel wholesome and enriched.

Johnny, where do you spend your nights? I haven't achieved your freedom: I need a home and a bed where I can sleep. And I cannot sleep in other people's homes. It has to be mine. Or a hotel. Have you enough money to travel? I expect you must have, because you were wearing a really smart *hippie* outfit and such outfits don't come cheap.

Johnny, in a moment of deep despair I asked God to help me. And help came. A complete stranger telephoned me. He said: Don't cry, because crying only makes you feel weak. I told him: Yes, but sometimes one needs to cry just as the soil needs rain after a spell of drought. I asked him to telephone again at six in the evening. He said it would be difficult. But he called me on the stroke of six. And my depression had lifted. We even laughed together. Next day, he telephoned again. We chatted. Quite spontaneously, he made a solemn promise that he would never tell anyone he knew me. I reassured him: If you ever feel you must tell someone, go ahead and tell them. Don't feel you have to keep your promise. But he insisted: No, that promise is binding because it's much too sacred.

Johnny, I once read that anguish is the vertigo of freedom. I am suffering from that vertigo but without any anguish. How can I explain? I am serious, yet smiling inwardly. Don't ask me why. Life makes me smile. My smile is enigmatic. It comes from inner forests, lakes, dams, mountains and skies. I am so enigmatic, Johnny. You are more transparent than me. You are mirth, a look of surprise. So long.

LOVE

A long time ago I met Ivan Lessa in some queue or other, and we were deep in conversation when Ivan, sounding startled, said to me: look at that odd sight. I looked behind me and saw a man coming round the corner, with his placid little dog on a lead.

Except that it was not a dog. The animal behaved like a dog, and the man behaved like a man walking his dog. But this was no dog. It had the elongated snout of an animal capable of drinking from a tall glass, and a long, hard tail. Admittedly, it could have been simply an unusual crossbreed. Ivan suggested that it might be a raccoon. But I thought the animal was too much like a dog in the way it trotted to be a raccoon. Unless it was the most domesticated and abnormal raccoon I had ever seen. Meanwhile the man was calmly approaching. Well, perhaps not calmly: there was a certain tenseness about him. It was the calm of someone who has accepted a challenge: he had the look of a born fighter. There was nothing eccentric about his behaviour; it was an act of courage that he should appear in public walking his pet. Ivan suggested it could be some other species, but the name had momentarily escaped him. I was not convinced. Only later did I understand my embarrassment; it was not exactly mine, but stemmed from the fact that the animal no longer knew what it was, and was unable, therefore, to project any clear image of itself.

Until the man passed us. Unsmiling, his shoulders drawn back, proudly appearing in public. No, it has never been easy, being judged by people standing in a queue and demanding more of us. The man pretended to have no need of admiration or pity; but we can all recognize the martyrdom of someone who is cherishing a dream.

– What animal is that? I asked the man, intuitively adopting a gentle tone of voice rather than offend him with my curiosity. I asked him what animal it was, but my question also implied: 'Why are you doing this? What has driven you to invent a dog? Why not a real dog? for dogs do exist! Or had you no other means of capturing the grace of this creature except with a collar? Don't you realize that you destroy a rose if you crush it in your hand?' I know that tone is a unity which cannot be divided by words,

but to splinter silence into words is one of my clumsy ways of loving silence. And by shattering silence I have so often killed what I understand. Although – glory be to God – I am more familiar with silence than with words.

Without stopping, the man replied briefly but without being curt. It *was* a raccoon. We kept on staring. Neither Ivan nor I smiled. There was an atmosphere of tension and intuition. We just stood there staring.

It was a raccoon which believed itself to be a dog. At times, with dog-like gestures, it would pause to sniff at things, which caused the lead to tighten and delayed its master in that familiar synchronization between man and dog. I stood there watching the raccoon which did not know what it was. I thought to myself: if the man is taking it to play in the park, there will come a moment when the raccoon will start to feel uneasy: 'Why for heaven's sake are dogs staring and barking at me so ferociously?' I also imagined that the raccoon, after having spent such a perfect day as a dog, might sadly be thinking to itself, as it looked up at the stars: 'What have I achieved in the end? What is missing in my life? I am as contented as any dog, so why this sense of emptiness, this longing? What is this anxiety, as if I were only capable of loving what I do not know?' And the man, the only person capable of ridding the raccoon of its uncertainty, that man will never answer those questions, for fear of losing the raccoon forever.

I also thought about the threatening hatred which existed in the raccoon. It felt love and gratitude for the man. But deep down, there was no way of avoiding the truth; only the raccoon did not perceive that it hated the man because it was essentially confused.

Suppose the mystery of its true nature had suddenly been revealed to the raccoon? I tremble to think of the fatal chance which might have brought that raccoon to an unexpected confrontation with another raccoon, and therefore to self-recognition. I tremble to think of that moment when the raccoon would have experienced the most blissful shame which is given to us... to me...to us...I know full well that the raccoon would have every right, on discovering the truth, to savage the man with all the hatred that one creature can inflict upon another – to defile the other's essence in order to exploit him. I sympathize with the animal, I side with the victims of perverted love. But I beseech the raccoon to pardon the man and to pardon the man with infinite love. Before abandoning him.

EXCERPTS

The most difficult thing is to do nothing: to remain alone before the cosmos. Work sends me into a coma. To do nothing is the ultimate silence: Some people cannot bear it. So they go off in search of amusement. I am writing this in the early hours of the morning. Perhaps because I am reluctant to remain alone before the world. Yet somehow I am not alone. Difficult to explain. But it is consoling.

Someone once told me about a novel in which one of the characters was unfamiliar with finger-bowls (bowls filled with tepid water to which several drops of lemon juice, for example, have been added. Then guests can wash their fingers after certain courses even if they have been eating with cutlery). Then I recalled how I myself had introduced this refinement (!) at formal dinner-parties. The waiter would pass finger-bowls to each guest with a rose petal floating on top. Some gracious little ritual? Nowadays it would never occur to me to use finger-bowls. Or am I deceiving myself? I cannot even remember where I've put those finger-bowls. They have vanished with the years. Perhaps they have been stolen. Mere reminiscence.

I find myself writing with the utmost ease and fluency. This ought to make me wary.

I remember one ambassador's wife in Washington who bullied and intimidated the wives of all the other diplomats attached to the Brazilian Embassy. She could be quite blunt and tyrannical. On one occasion, she warned the wife of the First Secretary: I don't want you turning up at the reception tonight looking like a sack. For some obscure reason, she always treated me with deference and respect. She was given to fits of depression and would sometimes telephone to ask if she might pay me a visit. I would agree and along she would come. I remember on one occasion as she sat on the sofa in my drawing-room, she told me confidentially that she could not stand a certain type of person. I was deeply shocked: she was unwittingly describing me. How little she knew me.

Anxious to avoid any embarrassment, I passed no comment. Had I told her what kind of person I really am, she would have

felt obliged to apologize. I listened in silence. After her husband's death, she eventually returned to Rio. She telephoned. She had brought me a present and begged me to go and see her. I never went. My generosity (?) has its limits. I am not inclined to spare the feelings of those whom I find offensive. Or am I? Of course I am. I have had to show a great deal of forbearance throughout the years.

* * *

I have received a personal invitation to attend a fashion show: a famous dress-designer is launching his spring collection. I've been thinking to myself: why should he invite me? To get some free publicity in my column? I could understand this invitation if I were 'fashion-conscious' or an *habituée* of fashion-houses. But I wear simple clothes and certainly cannot afford *haute-couture* prices. Needless to say, I have no intention of going. The show will be held late in the evening when I prefer to be in bed. But the invitation is tempting. Fashion-shows are such absurd affairs. Yet I do like having something new to wear. The dress-designer has spelt my name with a double s. A common occurrence. But I much prefer the correct spelling with one s followed by c. Will I go to the fashion show? That is the question.

* * *

One Sunday afternoon when I was at home and all alone, I suddenly bent over double – as if I were suffering the pangs of childbirth – and realized that the little girl inside me was dying. I shall never forget that Sunday. It took days for the scars to heal. And here I am. Strong, silent and heroic. The little girl no longer inside me.

* * *

At sunrise I shall go down to the beach. I shall go into the water. Such a nice feeling. Such a privilege! To think that I am still alive and able to bathe in the sea. Sometimes when I return from the beach, I avoid taking a shower. I prefer to let the salt settle on my skin. My father always used to say it was good for one's health. In fact, I am never ill. But illness is something we cannot predict. My father died in his prime. He never recovered

from an operation. I felt so bewildered. But somehow people are immortal. Even my readers.

* * *

Some days the postman delivers as many as three books. So I asked a Spanish friend, Jaime Vilaseca, who is a skilled craftsman, to make me a new bookshelf. He did a splendid job. And I watched him at work. He enjoyed the work so much that he started humming a Spanish melody. I poured out a glass of Coca-Cola for Jaime and his wife Gilda. As for those books, the situation is one of serious inflation. For too much is being written nowadays. Nevertheless I have found a publisher for a young man who could be described as a *hippie*. I asked him if he smoked marijuana. He smiled at my forthright question and told me: Sure, but I'm not an addict.

* * *

Someone passed on Rubem Braga's comment that I cannot write articles and that I really ought to concentrate on writing fiction. Is that true, Rubem? Well, all I can say, Rubem, is that I do my best. You have more talent than me when it comes to writing articles so don't expect too much of me. I write my articles with humility, Rubem. I have no illusions. People are always writing in to say how much they enjoy them. And I find those letters reassuring.

DIES IRAE

– This – the man said to himself, as he knelt like a warrior about to engage in battle – is the prayer of a man who is possessed. I am experiencing the hell of passion. I can think of no other name for this overwhelming frenzy other than passion. What is this violence that makes me beg forgiveness even of myself? It is the will to destroy as if I had been born for this moment of destruction. This moment which may come or pass. My choice will depend upon whether I listen to myself or not. God hears me, but shall I listen to myself? This will to destroy is momentarily still under control. I cannot destroy anyone or anything, for my compassion is as powerful as my wrath. Therefore I wish to destroy myself, I who am the source of this passion. I have no intention of asking God to placate me because my love for God is so great that I fear to touch Him with my plea. My plea can wound. My plea is so ardent that I could destroy the image of God within me, an image I am anxious to cherish. Yet there is no one else to turn to. God alone can lay His hand on me even at the risk of getting it burnt. Ignore my plea because it is so violent that it terrifies me. But to whom shall I turn in this brief moment of respite, if I have already distanced myself from other men? I have alienated myself from mankind. I have gradually suppressed any trace of sweetness in my nature with every blow I have received. Any residue of sweetness has turned as black as darkening clouds. I lower my head before the storm. What must divine wrath be like, if my own is so intense that it blinds me? If only this fury were to destroy no one but me. But I must protect others – others who have sustained my hope. What must I do in order to resist this omnipotence which engulfs me? What must I tell myself? Except the truth. Except the truth. I have only known one other thing as overwhelming, blind and intense as this craving of mine to wallow in violence: the sweetness of compassion. This is all that remains to balance the scales – for on the other side there is blood and the hatred of blood which is painful. What then do I want? I want each of my sorrows to correspond here and now to an act of wrath.

But I know what my sorrows have been. It is easy to show

anger. But sorrow caused me shame. Because my sorrow stems from the unhappy consequences of my other mortal sins. My violence – which is made of raw flesh and can only be nourished on raw flesh – this violence is the outcome of other inborn traits of violence in my nature which have been suppressed. Other traits of sinful violence which are so much a part of me. To begin with, they were almost indistinguishable from my greatest virtues. I had simply been born and only wanted to go on indulging my inclinations. And whenever anyone denied me or something was prohibited, whenever anything was refused me, I would smile, believing this to be the quiet smile of resignation. But it was sorrow masquerading as goodness. I knew this sorrow was offensive in the eyes of God – and, worse still, in my own eyes – whoever I might be. Every time my sins were thwarted, I suffered, but without feeling that I had the right to suffer, and I had to hide more than my sorrow. What was being trampled inside me? In my erstwhile truth, what was being trampled inside me? Mortal sins.

Mortal sins were clamouring within me for their release. They clamoured with shame: they demanded the right to exist. They were my hunger for the world: I wanted to devour the world and this craving for milk with which I was born, this hunger was trying to pervade the world, but the world refused to be devoured. Or rather, it wanted to be devoured, but insisted it should be devoured with the same humility with which it gave itself. But violent hunger is demanding and proud. And when that hunger passes, the world becomes hard on one's teeth and soul. The world only gives itself to simple men, while I was trying to devour it with all my strength and this wrath of mine. And when the bread turned to stone and gold between my teeth, I stubbornly pretended it did not hurt. I believed that to feign strength was a noble path for any man to pursue and the path of one's own strength. I believed strength was the substance from which the world is made and that I myself would confront the world with strength. It was only later that love for the world possessed me: and this was no mean hunger: it was voracious hunger. It was the sheer joy of living and here, at last, was my idea of freedom. But how did I come to transform unawares the joy of life into the sensuous pleasure of being alive? To begin with it was simply pleasant and innocent. It was love for the world as first light dawned over heaven and earth, and my eyes could still convey tenderness. But suddenly my nature was

assassinating me and it was no longer the sweetness of love for the world: it was an avid hunger for the world's abundance. And the world receded once more and I called that betrayal. The sensuous pleasure of being alive haunted my insomnia because I failed to recognize that the night of the world and the night of existence are so sweet that they send one to sleep. They send one to sleep, dear God. And in my craving for life, the water trickled through my fingers before reaching my lips. And I loved the other being with the passion of someone who wishes to save and to be saved by happiness. I did not know that mortal sin could only be avoided by taking a middle course. I felt ashamed of any such compromise. My sins are mortal not because God is destroying me but because I am dying of my sins. It is I who could not cope with mortal sin. What I failed to achieve with my sins is that very same thing which now does me violence, and to which I react with violence. My clumsy and pitiful efforts have gained me neither heaven nor earth and I am possessed by wrath. Ah, if only for one moment I might see that this wrath is directed at my sins and not those of others, then this wrath of mine would be transformed into flowers in my hands. Into flowers, into delicate blooms, into love. Still unable to suppress hatred, I now realize that my hatred is frustrated love, my hatred is life still waiting to be lived. For I have experienced everything: everything except life. This is what I cannot forgive myself and as long as I cannot forgive myself, I cannot forgive others. This is what I have come to: having failed to attain life, I want to destroy it. This wrath of mine, which is nothing but revenge, this wrath of mine – as I must know at this rare moment of choice – this wrath of mine is the reverse of my love. If I were finally to yield submissively to the world's sweetness, then I should call my wrath love. I was so afraid of pledging myself forever with this first word (love) which I can scarcely bring myself to utter, that I took refuge in violence and in the bloodshot eyes of passion. And all this, all this for fear of prostrating myself at Your feet and at the anonymous feet of *the other* who has always represented *You*. What monarch am I who refuses to pay homage? I must choose between lost pride and the love-current of ignorance and sweetness. Will my ancient truth continue to serve me? God condemned the seven deadly sins not because He demanded perfection but simply because He took pity on mankind. And on me who, like so many others, tries to evade Him and to evade others. I know that those others are Him. Now

I must choose between loving and hating. I know that love takes longer and I am consumed with a sense of urgency. Cover my wrath with Your love, because I also know that my wrath is simply an absence of love. My wrath is to have to cope with the intolerable burden of not being a plant. I am a plant which feels impotent and vulnerable. Rid me of this false destructive omnipotence. Make me understand at this moment of choice that he who wounds is a sinner like me. In the grip of that pride which leads to wrath, he wounds in the same way as I attempt to wound, simply because he has no faith. Simply because he has no confidence. Simply because he sees himself as an unthroned monarch. Help those consumed by wrath for they need only surrender to Your grace. And since Your greatness is beyond my understanding, appear to me so that I may know You: appear as a father, a mother, a friend, a brother, a lover, a child. Wrath is transformed into compassion within my soul, for you are the sorrow of not being able to love.

LOVE, RACCOON, DOG, FEMININE AND MASCULINE

Perhaps some of my readers will remember an article entitled 'Love' which appeared in this column on the eleventh of September. You may remember that I told you about a man who had tamed a raccoon and took it for walks with a collar round its neck. This left the poor raccoon totally confused and no longer certain to which species it belonged. I also made the point that, if the raccoon were to see another raccoon, it would recognize itself. And then I begged the raccoon, once freed of this nature which had been inflicted on it, not to judge the man too harshly because he had only done this in his search for love. That is to say, before he finally abandoned the raccoon. For once any creature has discovered its own identity, there is no turning back.

One of my readers invented a story of his own about the raccoon and its master, a story full of unexpected reversals, some rather arbitrary, others quite profound. One of those stories which make children sit up at bedtime and listen with their eyes wide open, even if they do not grasp all the details. This inspired reader addresses me as C.L., and the signature written in a curious hand, is illegible. Here is his version of the raccoon's adventures:

'The man who owned the raccoon thought his pet had found another master. He missed the animal and experienced that sorrow reserved for people who own raccoons, but he shrugged it off. It was not long before the raccoon, which had vanished, returned to its previous owner with the mark of the collar still round its neck. There was no clear proof that this raccoon-cum-dog had ever found another master.

– Very well – said the man – now you will have to bark. He knew this was impossible for a raccoon. The animal sloped off and settled down in the same old basket. For several days the raccoon's master did nothing except tend a rose which he was trying to preserve in a glass of water. The rose withered. Then he tried to get the raccoon to follow him everywhere just like a dog, even without a collar. The poor animal was confused. The man then thought about taking the raccoon to some remote spot in the forest where he could set it free and let it die of freedom.

But deep down he was fond of the animal, not in the way one is fond of a dog or raccoon, but as if it were a human being, because the raccoon's master was incapable of liking real people. I shall explain at the end of my story.

But first I should mention that, when the raccoon was still a cub, its father was shot in cold blood by one of those so-called hunters who claim to be exterminating vermin but who in reality loathe every healthy animal in sight that enjoys its freedom. The raccoon's mother was unable to find another mate of the same species and in sheer desperation began mating with a dog. And it was this same dog which first tried to corrupt the true nature of the orphaned cub. Not in order to transform it into a puppy, but in order to prove that the offspring of a raccoon could never acquire the stature of a fully-grown dog and would never be anything more than a miserable raccoon.

The cub's stepfather had no pups of his own and the little raccoon was an endearing little creature with intelligent eyes. This explains many things. The poor little raccoon, repressed, and knowing nothing of life, although it had never forgotten the image of its beloved father, began to dream it was a dog. It was easy to find someone who would lovingly put a collar round its neck. And the interesting thing about this story is that the man who became the master of a raccoon was also reared by a dog and suckled by a bitch.

He had never been orphaned, but his father had abandoned his mother when he knew she was pregnant, rather than marry her. Disgraced and abandoned, the man's mother was enslaved by a family of wealthy merchants who took her far away from her native province. When her child was born, she found she did not have enough milk to feed it herself. At this time there was still no such thing as powdered milk and cow's milk was no good. No slave could afford to hire a wet-nurse. Then one of those strange coincidences occurred. A woman who was mysteriously transformed into a bitch had already given birth to a healthy little boy and she had enough milk to feed the slave's child as well.

While the latter was suckled by the bitch (who obviously had no affection for the child), her own child, who was already overfed, was breast-fed by the slave. You can imagine the confusion in people's minds when such things happen. The slave's child grew up with emotional problems when he tried to relate to people and dogs, and he was forever envious of the other boy

who had been fed with the same milk. So one day he tried to adopt a raccoon as if it were a dog and he wanted to love it as if he were loving a human being. The slave's son knows that he is incapable of human love, so he must seek love elsewhere. And any love which is true cannot be bad. But it can be hatred in disguise.

For all the characters in this story, and for all of us, the great challenge is to recapture lost essence, to restore integrity, and achieve totality. We must find our own soul.'

HOW TO AVOID A NAKED MAN

I am referring to a film which would not scandalize anyone. And yet the film has been banned in Brazil. Although, ironically enough, it has been sold to foreign distributors. Made by Condor Productions, the film was scripted and directed by Nélson Pereira dos Santos.

The only thing I dislike is the title – *Como era gostoso o meu francês* [Such a Tasty Frenchman] – which adds a facetious note to a film which was anything but facetious.

Period: The sixteenth century. Location: The French Antarctic.* After escaping sentence of death, Jean (Arduíno Colasanti) encounters a band of Portuguese sailors who have been shipwrecked and end up in hostile territory (Brazil). The Portuguese detain the Frenchman and give him two tiny cannons to use against the Indians. The latter make a surprise attack and capture Jean, mistaking him for a powerful Portuguese leader when they find him in charge of the cannons. Jean becomes the slave of Cunhambebe (Eduardo Imbassaí), the great chieftain of the Tupinamba people, who intends to kill and devour Jean in order to appropriate his artillery. This will give the chieftain greater military strength in his struggle against the Portuguese.

In the Indian encampment, the prisoner is guarded by a widow, Seboipep (Ana Maria Magalhães), who also serves as a wife until the day of his execution. With the passing of time, Jean gradually comes to understand the language and beliefs of the Indians and begins to adopt their customs. He obtains gunpowder for his cannons and uses them in a battle waged by the Tupinambas against Indian tribes friendly towards the Portuguese. Just as he expects to be freed, Jean realizes that Cunhambebe has simply been testing his military skills before slaughtering and eating him during a great feast to celebrate victory.

It took five years to make this film. Documents and artefacts

* *The French Antarctic*: The name given by the French admiral Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon (1510-70) to the colony he created on the Island of Sergipe in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro. Supported by the Tamayo Indians, the rebellious Villegaignon held out against the French authorities from 1555 until 1567.

were scrupulously researched at the National Library and Museum of the Brazilian Indian in Rio, in the archives of the Agency for the Protection of the Indians and in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

Among the books consulted were: Portuguese translations of Alfred Métraux's *Civilização tupinamba* [Tupinambá Civilization], Hans Staden's *Viagem ao Brasil* [Voyage to Brazil] and Jean de Lery's *Tupinambás*; and Florestan Fernandes' *Civilização tupinambá*, alongside contemporary accounts of Indian tribes in sixteenth-century Brazil.

The dialogues were written in *tupi-guarani* by Humberto Mauro. The French spoken during this period (which sounds like music to the ear) was devised by French specialists. For four months, the camera crew worked night and day. The beaches and forests along the coastal region stretching from Parati to Angra dos Reis made ideal locations.

This interesting film of extraordinary beauty, which evokes the origins of Brazil, cost seven hundred and sixty thousand cruzeiros to make, which at the time was the equivalent of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

To ensure authenticity, Indian settlements were reconstructed, the costumes and jewellery of the Tupinambas were copied in every detail, and artefacts of the period were borrowed from private collections or made from original drawings. The project was carried out in collaboration with the Brazilian Army, the Regional Authorities of Parati, the administration of FUNAI,* the Museum of the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro and the Fortress of São João.

The entire cast had their bodies completely shaved as was the practice of the Tupinambas. They were then painted to conform to descriptions of the Indians chronicled by sixteenth-century explorers and historians.

And yet this film was banned in Brazil and released *solely for export*. The censors found it offensive to public morality. What worried them was the male nudity in the film. After some discussion, they compromised and allowed the Indians to be shown naked, but they remained adamant that the white man (the Frenchman who had ended up living among the Indians and

* *FUNAI (Fundação Nacional para Auxílio aos Indios)* Controversial government organization established to assist and protect Indian communities in Brazil. Work has been hampered by bureaucracy and a serious lack of funds.

adopting their way of life) could not be shown naked under any circumstances.

Perhaps I am being naïve but would someone please tell me: What is the difference between the naked body of an Indian and that of a white man?

I myself saw the film at a private showing. There were others present. Two of the women invited were Mothers Superior from nearby convents. They thought the film most *beautiful and pure*, not to mention its historical value as an authentic reconstruction of colonial Brazil. They found the dialogue full of poetry. The only immorality – in their opinion – was the greed of a treacherous French merchant intent upon plundering Indian treasure – a sharp reminder of contemporary values.

How I long to see this film distributed here in Brazil. It is simply unfair that foreign audiences should be allowed to enjoy a film which has so much to say to people living here in Brazil. And the ban is wholly unjustified when one considers that there is not a single lewd gesture or the merest hint of obscenity throughout the entire film. And I can assure you that the naked body of Arduíno Colasanti could scarcely be more chaste. Soon the censors will be telling us that the sight of a naked little boy is obscene. And in any case, what difference is there between looking at a naked boy and a naked man? It reminds me of some verses a certain José Augusto from São Paulo once sent me:

> I walked naked through the streets
> To everyone's dismay.
> They only recognize me
> Wearing a suit
> With shirt and tie.*

So just in case of any misunderstanding, those Tupinambas ought to be shown wearing a suit and shirt and tie.

* 'Saí nu na rua / e não me entenderam. / Vou pôr terno e gravata.'

THE USE OF INTELLECT

Perhaps this has been my greatest struggle in life: in order to comprehend my non-intelligence, to understand my feelings, I have been obliged to become intelligent. (Intelligence is necessary in order to understand non-intelligence. Except that the instrument – the intellect – continues to be used from force of habit. And so we are unable to gather things with clean hands directly from source.)

THE GREATEST EXPERIENCE

I should have liked to be other people first in order to know what I was not. Then I realized that I had already been those others and found it easy. My greatest experience would have been to be the essence of others: and I was the essence of others.

TO LIE, TO THINK

The worst thing about lying is that it creates a false truth. (No, no, this is not as obvious as it seems nor is it a truism; I know what I am trying to say without quite knowing how to phrase it. Moreover, I find it irritating that everything has to be phrased *in a certain way* – an imposition which can be very restricting.) What then, was I trying to think? Perhaps this: if a lie were simply the denial of truth, then that would be one of the ways (by means of denial) of telling the truth. But the worst lie of all is the *creative* lie. (There is no doubt: it irritates me even to have to think, for before I started trying to think I knew perfectly well what I had in mind.)

WRITING BETWEEN THE LINES

To write, therefore, is the way in which someone uses the word as bait: the word fishes for something that is not a word.

When this non-word takes the bait, something has been written. Once what lies between the lines has been caught, the word can be discarded with a sense of relief. But here the analogy ends: the non-word, upon taking the bait, has assimilated it. Salvation, then, lies in writing *without thinking*.

TO REMEMBER WHAT NEVER EXISTED

To write often means remembering what never existed. So how can I know what has never existed? Like this: as if I were remembering. By an effort of *memory*, as if I had never been born. I was never born. I have never lived. But I remember, and remembering is like an open wound.

ONE OF THE CHOSEN

Even as a boy he was someone who insisted on choosing. Among the thousand things which he might have been, he exercised the right to choose. Putting on his spectacles, he would set to work, trying to see whatever he could and probing with sweaty hands the things he could not see. He was trying to choose and indirectly chose himself. Little by little, he forged his own personality. He went on and on selecting the essentials. In relative freedom, if one discounted the furtive determinism which quietly operated without giving itself a name. Discounting this furtive determinism, he was free to choose himself. He separated the so-called wheat from the chaff and ate only the best. Sometimes he ate the worst: and that was his most difficult choice. He separated perils from the great peril, and found to his dismay that what he was left with was the great peril itself. To his horror, he found himself determining the weight of things. He pushed aside the lesser truths which he ended up ignoring. The truths he craved were the most difficult to bear.

But after ignoring the lesser truths, he began to resemble other beings, as if enshrouded in mystery. His ignorance transformed him into a mysterious being. He had also become a mixture of what others thought of him and what he really was: a wise ignoramus; an ingenuous sage; oblivious, yet well aware of other things; an honest rogue; an unconscious thinker; a man full of nostalgia for the things he once knew, and full of regret for the things he had irretrievably lost after making a definite choice; a courageous human being because it was now too late and he had already chosen. Paradoxically, this gave him the discreet and wholesome contentment of the peasant who only has to cope with simple things. This gave him that unintentional austerity which all essential labour confers. When it came to choosing and adjusting, there was no fixed time for starting or finishing: it was the task of a lifetime.

Paradoxically, all this gradually gave him that deep happiness which one must shout and communicate to others. This presented no problem because he liked communicating with others. This was not something he had chosen or cultivated: it was truly

a gift. He enjoyed the deep happiness of others, and his innate gift helped him to discover the happiness of others. The same gift also allowed him to discover the solitude of others. It also helped him to treat life as a game by transforming it into colours and forms. An inborn instinct taught him that gestures, without causing offence or scandal, could convey the liking he felt for others. Without so much as feeling that he was using this gift, he revealed himself; he gave to others without realizing that he was giving; he loved without knowing that this was what was known as love. The gift was like the shirt this contented man did not possess. Because he felt so poor and had nothing to give, he gave himself. He gave himself in silence, and gave what he had made of himself, just as one summons others to come and take a look.

Little by little he came to be surrounded by misunderstanding: the others looked at him as if he were a statue, as if he were a photograph. They failed to understand that in order to forge his personality, he had undergone a painful process of stripping away rather than embellishment. Because of a misunderstanding, he found himself being fêted. Because of a misunderstanding, he found himself being loved. But to feel oneself being loved was like recognizing oneself in the love received. And this man was loved as if he were someone else: one of the chosen. He shed the tears of the unmoving statue which weeps at night in the public square. The darkness in the square had never been so intense. Until daylight returned and that person was reborn. The earth's rhythm was so generous that dawn broke. But when night returned, darkness fell once more. The square was once more engulfed in solitude. Those who had chosen, slept in fear. Afraid because they thought they would have to dwell in the solitude of the square. They did not know that this solitary square was his place of work. That he, too, felt lonely. He had organized his entire life in order to function outside the square. It is true that once he felt prepared, anointed with oils and perfumes, he realized there was not enough time left to exist like the others: he was different, however reluctantly. Something had gone wrong for, when he saw himself in the photograph the others had taken, he was alarmed and embarrassed by what he saw there. They had turned him, no more, no less, into one of the chosen. They had robbed him of his freedom. How could he rectify their mistake? In order to make their task easy and save time, they had photographed him in only one pose. And now

they no longer referred to him but simply to the photograph. All they had to do was open a drawer and take out his photograph. Besides, anyone could acquire a copy. It did not cost much.

When they told him: I love you, he felt uncomfortable and could not even express his gratitude. And me? What about me? Why only my photograph? But he did not protest because he knew that the others were not acting out of malice. Sometimes in his loneliness he tried in vain to imitate the photograph. This only served to make the false image in the photograph seem all the more authentic. At times he became quite confused: he found himself unable to copy the photograph and had even forgotten what he looked like in reality. So, like the laughing clown, he often wept beneath his painted mask of court jester.

Then he secretly tried to destroy the photograph. He did or said such contradictory things to the photograph that the corners turned up with rage as it lay there in the drawer. He hoped to become more real than his image. But what happened? It turned out that all he did was to touch up the image in the photograph.

And so it went on until all his hopes were dashed and he died of loneliness. But he finally escaped from that statue in the square after considerable effort. He had a number of falls before learning to walk by himself. And, as the saying goes, earth had never seemed more fair. He recognized that this was the land for which he had prepared himself. So he had not been mistaken, after all, and the map locating the treasure had given the right directions. As he walked, he touched everything in sight, and smiled. Even though alone, he was smiling. He had learned to smile on his own.

LONDON'S BRIDGES

Every time I think of London I can see those bridges again. I felt quite at home in London, but to think that I actually lived there for a time now makes me realize my good fortune. For me, London was mysterious and pulsating with life, yet grey. And everything grey has a strange effect on me, as if all the muted shades were being merged into one.

I saw the ugliness of the English at close quarters, which is one of the most appealing things about England. It is such a peculiar ugliness, and yet so beautiful. I am being serious. The winters were chilly and the harsh wind brought a rosy colour to cheeks and hands which made people look all too real. Women in London go shopping with baskets; the men who work in the City wear bowler-hats. And the Thames looks foul with its muddy waters. London was once stricken by plague. And a great fire razed the entire city to the ground. I could sense the presence of both plague and fire when I lived there.

Londoners drink the most horrid coffee out of large cups which give off steam. The whole island gives off steam, its blackened bridges emerging from perpetual mist. *Fog* emanates from the city's cobblestones and enshrouds the bridges. London's bridges make a deep impression. Some are solid and menacing. Others almost skeletal.

The English themselves are not all that intelligent. Yet England has shown herself to be one of the most intelligent nations in the world. We went around by car. There are mazes of tiny villages between one large town and the next. A fine drizzle spatters on the car windows. People on the streets are so badly dressed that they end up giving the impression of being quite stylish. And they do know how to wrap up in bad weather. I can picture a child I once saw, smothered in a heavy, dark overcoat, wearing thick woollen socks and a hood which tied under the chin. The child had a pinched little face with bright, knowing eyes and rosy cheeks. And that pure intonation peculiar to English voices, at once superior and questioning.

Only now do I appreciate just how much I loved those London winds which made my eyes water and caused my skin to look chapped.

And then there were those outings into the countryside and the English landscape which is so unlike any other. I can still see those incredibly tall trees.

The English love exploring their own island and there is a sense of restless toing and froing in all directions.

A visit to the theatre in London is a memorable experience. Watching English actors sends a shiver down the spine. The English actor is the most serious man in England. Within the space of a few hours, he makes each member of the audience aware of those essential things one tends to lose sight of in everyday life. You step out of the theatre into rain and darkness, on to wet pavements and those quaint English streets which make one long for some perilous adventure. We go to dinner. The traditional fare served in English restaurants is quite dreadful and makes one irritable. Fortunately there are plenty of ethnic restaurants in London where the food is much more appetising.

Remnants of medieval England can be seen in the city's towers. The self-assurance of certain Englishmen can be amusing. Accustomed to war, they stride rather than walk along the pavements. And were the world not such a sad place, this struggle for survival might have a certain charm.

I remember with affection English writers who are no longer alive. Especially D.H. Lawrence.

The Queen has a sweet smile. English newspapers are curiously provincial. Any English men or women with good features somehow acquire an extraordinary beauty. But English children are always endearing and when they open their little mouths to speak, they become irresistible.

I am indulging in nostalgia as I try to recapture my memories of London from random notes. I am writing this in haste before they fade forever.

THE OLD LADY

She lived in a boarding-house on São Clemente Street. She was enormous and smelled like a chicken when it is brought half-cooked to the table. She had five teeth, withered lips and a dry throat. Her past reputation was no invention. She still spoke in French whenever she found an opportunity, even if the other person spoke Portuguese and would have preferred to be spared the embarrassment of listening to his or her own poor accent. The absence of saliva removed any trace of fluency, and gave the old girl an air of restraint. There was majesty in that huge body supported on tiny feet, in the strength of those five teeth, in those stray hairs which escaped from a sparse bun and trembled with the slightest breeze.

But one Monday morning instead of coming down from her room, she came in from the street. Her skin looked smooth, her neck washed, and there was no longer any smell of half-cooked chicken. She explained that she had spent Sunday at her son's house where she had stayed overnight. She was wearing a dowdy black satin dress. Instead of going up to her room to change into an old cotton dress and revert to being a lonely guest living in a boarding-house, she sat in the lounge to make the most of her Sunday and commented that the family is the pillar of society. She referred in passing to the leisurely bath which she had enjoyed in her daughter-in-law's comfortable bathroom, which explained why she looked clean and was no longer smelling. She made the other residents, who were still in their pyjamas and dressing-gowns, feel awkward as she sat there for hours on end by the tall vase of flowers in the lounge, holding a conversation intended for some invisible audience.

As the afternoon wore on, it became clear that her boots were pinching, but she continued to sit there, all dressed up, holding her large head erect as if she were a prophet. When she enthused about the sumptuous meals served at her son's house, her eyes closed with nausea. She rushed to the bathroom. They could hear her vomit but she refused any offer of assistance when they knocked at the door.

When it was time for dinner she came down to ask for a cup

of tea; there were brown circles round her eyes, and she was wearing an ankle-length floral-patterned dress, and was once again without a bra. What still looked strange was the clearness of her skin. The other guests avoided looking at her in her distress. She spoke to no one: King Lear. She was silent, enormous, dishevelled, and clean. Her happiness had been short-lived.

THE SWAN

In flight, those long clumsy arms became apparent: they were wings. It had a silly expression, an expression which matched the vast horizons of its feverish thoughts. It waddled on the ground, but it could fly. It flew so well that it even risked its life, a life which was so precious. It looked absurd as it waddled cautiously; an ugly duckling. Once on the ground, it walked like an invalid.

SUNDAY EVENING

The garden is awash with rain. The rain is heavy and the air glistens. Only the corolla of a red rose remains opaque. Water trickles over the pebbles and down the window-panes, leaves hang heavily against the sky. The thorny stems of climbing roses shudder as the soil turns to mud. The summer storm rages. Lost in thought as I look from my window, I find myself wondering: Will this rain have spoiled the Horse Trials?

MAKING MISTAKES

Making a mistake is a much more serious matter among intelligent people: for they have all the arguments at their disposal to prove their point.

SKETCH OF A WARDROBE

One has the impression of being able to get inside the wardrobe because it has a door. But on opening it, it becomes clear that there is no way through: because inside there is another wooden surface, almost like another closed door. Its function: to keep transvestites in the dark. Its nature: the inviolability of things. Its relationship with people: people look at themselves in its mirror without much light because the wardrobe is never in the right spot: awkward, it stands wherever it can be accommodated; it is always colossal, humped and self-conscious, without quite knowing how to be more discreet. A wardrobe is always clumsy, obtrusive, sad and kind. But its mirrored door closes, and when it moves, light flickers amidst the shadows as the composition of the room changes. (The wardrobe's subtle contribution to the room, a clear sign of its dual existence, of its influence in the world, its presence defined in tones of chestnut-brown, the real power standing in the wings.)

A NOBLE LADY OF ANOTHER AGE

She was born in the Château de Poissonnière in the Loire Valley. Her dress fell in pleats from a high waistband: her long tresses were scarcely ever washed. She would sit at her spinning-wheel. The castle was surrounded by forests. The green moon made one think of an ambush. There were nightingales and a well. She sang to herself ever so softly. The surrounding territory was divided into military regions. Weather-beaten stewards groomed the horses. Great iron keys locked the gates. The wind blew, and amidst the shadows of her chamber stood the lady's pristine couch. Dogs prowled the courtyard: some fifteen of them were barking. The blacksmith was at his forge, with bellows and anvil: the hammering never ceased. Galloping horsemen approached in a cloud of dust; they alighted. Forming a garland around the well, the daisies trembled in the wind of the Loire valley. Much copper and silver. The avuncular bishop. A golden chalice. Regular visits from her Father Confessor: his hands crossed on

his lap, as he hears her confession. She was a woman of her time. She died in 1513 and was buried in the chapel in the forest. One hundred years later her remains were transferred, and subsequently moved once more. Until all that remained of her was the castle in which she had lived and the beautiful valley of the Loire. And in the museum, an unsigned vase dating from the sixteenth century. It had been painted by the noble lady who had always shown a keen interest in the decorative arts of the period.

IN MEMORY OF THE MAN WHO STOOD DOWN

I wonder to what extent he himself understood his decision to resign from the nation's highest office? It is difficult to imagine his bewilderment and isolation. When an irrational act sends back a monstrous echo, the man probably feels innocent of the outcry his resignation has provoked: one tremor after another brought down an avalanche. He himself cannot explain the real reasons for his decision, reasons he may never know for they have already been buried under endless pretexts and explanations. He spoke of *personal* reasons and that is a crime for any man in public life. The sacrifice demanded of any leader, saint or artist who has achieved his goal by being highly *personal* from the outset – is to stop being personal. The cross they must bear is to forget their own existence. It is precisely in this self-abnegation that something essentially human occurs, whereby a man becomes all mankind: personal sorrow becomes so vast that it embraces everyone, offering them a refuge where they will find understanding: because of the love implicit in the renunciation of one's personal sorrow, those close to death are restored to life. The true meaning of Christ is to imitate Him. Except that Christ Himself imitated some other Christ.

The whole of Brazil could have been regenerated by that man, for here is someone who knew all about fear and ambition. Here was a man who knew himself: he must have been aware of his own tendency to act rashly. But this, too, could have helped us to mature. Just as overcoming an urge to kill – an abyss we are all capable of recognizing – helps to prevent others from killing themselves. But this public man held back. He diminished the stature of human weakness with a number of petty failings. Criminal because petty. He was a man who needed to be guided rather than to guide. He proved it. There is no way of forgiving him unless we remind ourselves that we humans are weak.

THIS DAY A CHILD IS BORN

In the stable all was calm and peaceful. It was late evening and no guiding star had yet appeared. Meanwhile there was this serene happiness of a birth – which never fails to renew the world and make it begin as if for the first time – this gentle happiness reserved just for a little Jewish family. There were others who sensed that something was happening on Earth but they could see nothing and knew nothing for certain. As darkness fell, lying on straw the colour of gold and tender as a lamb, the child Jesus looked radiant; as tender as our own little son. Nearby, an ox and an ass looked on and warmed the air with their breath.

The child had been born and its tiny body perspired; moist and warm.

Mary rested her weary body, her task in this world before God and mankind was to fulfil her destiny, and now she was resting and watching with loving eyes. Joseph, with his long beard, sat there meditating: his task of understanding had been accomplished.

The child's destiny was to be born.

One could hear, as if amidst the silence of night, that ethereal music known to all of us and which is made from silence. It was tuneless yet extremely sweet, and composed of sounds which could be made into a melody. Floating and uninterrupted. Sounds like fifteen thousand stars. The little family captured the first vibrations in the air, as if silence were speaking.

The silence of Almighty God was speaking. Clear and continuous yet in no way harsh or strident and criss-crossed with horizontal and oblique sounds. Thousands of echoes with the same pitch and intensity, the same tranquil rhythm: a happy night, a sacred night.

And the destiny of the animals went on being fulfilled there in the manger: their destiny to love without knowing they were loving. Those gentle beasts fully understood the innocence of children. And, before the arrival of the Three Wise Men, they offered to the newborn child everything they possessed: those large watchful eyes and their warmth like that of the womb.

This child, which is brought back to life in every new-born child wanted us to be brethren in the face of our condition and in the eyes of God. This child would become man and speak.

This day in homes throughout the world a Child is born.

1972

MAKING CONVERSATION: 1972

How long since I last saw a sunset? And were the ones I saw happy? Perhaps there was a certain inhibition which prevented me from going down to the shore to watch the sun go quietly down at the hour when one can contemplate it without being dazzled, without the harsh glare of an arrow transfixed in the midday sky. For at sunset the sun goes down exuding tenderness. And part of our Earth transforms itself into a dark, rocking cradle.

This progressive darkness makes me apprehensive and, like all of God's creatures, I am on my guard. Is it the darkness? No, it is fear and alarm. Day extinguishing itself in night is one of Nature's greatest mysteries.

What is Nature? A difficult question to answer because we are part of nature and too close to be able to confront it: nature bursts from my heart like seed breaking through the soil. Nature – how can one fully explain its singular meaning? How can one hope to comprehend its enigmatic simplicity? I cannot remember when or where I heard or read this word: but no one explained it to me. Yet I understood it. Anyone who does not already know it will never find out. For there are certain things one never learns.

Nature amazes me in this world which is God. And on a planet where life manifests itself even amidst the desert sands.

Still recovering from the year which has just ended, I shall go on to tell you about the desert, now that I have mentioned it. I once found myself on the edge of the Sahara, beyond the Pyramids. Desert. As far as the eye could see. On all sides perdition. We cannot see how far it stretches because of the line on the horizon where the Earth curves. For the desert, like the sea, has a line on the horizon. And like the sea, it is fathomless.

My first impression of the desert was one of terror. I was anxious to cross it quickly and get to the other side. On another occasion I flew over the Sahara and felt just as terrified. I imagined myself lost and alone on those never-ending sands where there are no tracks, dear God. There one would cry for help in vain.

I must stop here rather than cause others anguish: what we

want is a New Year free of anguish. A secure bridge that will extend smoothly and safely into 1973, making our passage painless.

I spoke of anguish. What is anguish? This search of mine for meaning is in itself a kind of anguish. This is something which starts with life for when they cut the umbilical cord there is pain and separation. And in the end, I weep for life itself.

Life? Life is very serious. Life is no joke. Even if I am being whimsical about this precious New Year which has just begun. I face up to life and live it to the full. Certain moments are so vivid that I skim over the pages before anyone can catch up on me. I have learned how to be elusive.

Sometimes one has to come to terms with anguish: it can be fruitful and bring joy and perfection. One must never be afraid of *being creative*, I once wrote some years ago. And I find it strange to be quoting myself...

Creation is something mysterious and obscure. How did Stravinsky, for example, come to compose *The Firebird*? With his soul, no doubt. But where is the soul?

I never thought I would find myself writing about *the soul*. But one topic has led to another and here I am, in body and soul, and writing a column for a newspaper. What is described as essence must reside somewhere in our being. But what constitutes the essence of life?

What I do not know surpasses me. Truth surpasses me with so much patience and tenderness.

I should like to surpass myself in 1972 and walk ahead of myself. Without pain. Or only with those birth pangs which herald the arrival of something new. Moreover, by surpassing oneself, one emerges from *self* and becomes *the other*. The *other* is always very important.

Summer has settled in my heart.

And all that remains is this last phrase which came to me in isolation: without any context or explanation. Is this how we are? Without explanation?

If this is how we are, so be it.

I refuse to be some *fait accompli*.

Meanwhile I am being idle. Farewell.

MARRIAGE IN PROGRESS

After a phase in which they exchanged words of love, words of anger, or simply words, relations between them became so strained that words and facts became obscured. They had been married for so long that their differences, mutual suspicions and a certain rivalry no longer came to the surface, although this was the level on which they understood each other. This stage virtually ruled out any offence or defence, or any explanations. They were what is normally referred to as an ordinary married couple.

NOTEBOOK

'Everyone who has done great deeds has been motivated by the need to get out of some difficult situation or impasse.' I came across this phrase in an old notebook of mine. I translated it from the original French but I have no idea when it was written and by whom. Not that it matters, for this is one of life's great truths and could have been written by anyone.

EXERCISE

I find it strange to be writing in a lighter vein for the general reader. I who have always written *my things* for the few. It is a nice feeling. Besides, I have recently come to terms with myself and have discovered to my surprise that I am bearable and, on occasion, even pleasant.

Well, perhaps not all that often.

CORRECT ASSUMPTIONS

Let us assume that the telephone system has broken down throughout the city, which happens to be true. Let us assume that I dial a number and it is engaged, which happens to be true. Let us assume that the unengaged tone suddenly starts ringing

when I finally make a connection, which happens to be true. Let us assume no one answers, which happens to be true. Let us assume that, instead of getting an answer, I get a crossed line, which happens to be true. Let us assume that out of curiosity I overhear a conversation between a man and a woman, which happens to be true. Let us assume that, as they end their conversation, I distinctly hear a certain phrase, which happens to be true. Let us assume that the phrase I hear distinctly is: 'May God bless you', which happens to be true. Let us then assume that I feel myself well and truly blessed because that phrase was also intended for me. Is that not true? Yes. That phrase was intended for me. I shall make no more assumptions. But simply say *Yes* to the world.

MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS

Let us assume that I am a strong person, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that when I reach a decision I then carry it through, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that one day I shall write something which will lay bare the human soul, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that I always have this serious expression I confront in the mirror when I wash my hands, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that those whom I love are happy, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that I have fewer serious defects than I have, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that it only needs a pretty flower to uplift my spirits, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that I am finally smiling on this day of all days which is not my day for smiling, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that among my defects there are also many good qualities, which does not happen to be true. Let us assume that I never tell lies, which does not happen to be true. Let us suppose that one day I might turn over a new leaf and change my way of life, which does not happen to be true.

ELUSIVE SUBTLETIES

The Indian dancer makes solemn, priest-like gestures, then comes to a halt. Standing quite still for several moments forms part of the dance. The dance almost dispenses with motion: the dancer's movements immobilize everything. The dancer passes from one static pose to another, allowing time for wonder. His sudden stillness is often an echo from the previous leap: the still air retains the whole vibration of a gesture. The dancer is now completely motionless. Existence becomes sacred, as if we were merely the protagonists of life.

This is the dance of the male, who has knowledge of numbers and altitudes, and to whom greater strength of feeling is permitted.

As for the female Indian dancer, she exudes total serenity. Her movements are as fluid and enveloping as the motionless current of a river. She has the elongated curves of women of ancient times. The hips of this particular dancer are unusually broad, thus limiting her latent powers of thought. These are women devoid of malice. And in silent dance they restore the primitive meaning of grace. Even sensuality becomes part of that grace, except that it is a little more intense.

The audience is restless because this dance, passed down throughout the centuries, is extremely monotonous. Besides, it is inevitable that we should feel uneasy when confronted by Eastern culture; theirs is another way of knowing life: their way. Then there is another reason for our disquiet: we sense that they do not believe in us. For there are certain movements executed by the dancers which leave us cold in the West. They believe in masks, they believe in a greater love: these are ancient things, and much too serene.

The interminable programme I am leafing through announces that the next item for three female dancers will display every aspect of 'female allure'. What a disappointment. The three women who come on stage barely move. I look in vain for the promised 'female allure', and what I see are three women who move with utter tranquillity, as if that in itself were enough. And worst of all, somehow it is enough. As if they were saying

to the audience: behold the rarest of fruits, while showing us nothing more than an orange. Taken by surprise, I can now see that the orange is indeed rare among the rarest of fruits.

Never easily satisfied, I am amazed at how little they offer. Overweight and feeling uncomfortably white, we are settled in our seats, awaiting the offerings of the Three Wise Men. But they consign us to our poverty, like people accustomed to satisfying their greed while they tacitly accept that hunger is simple. They begin to dance without malice, turning their backs on our piercing glances. By now, we are ashamed at having let them see that we possess so much more – not what they possess, it is true, but so much more. Smiling with embarrassment, we try to do justice to this poor man's banquet, pretending with gratitude that we are eating pheasant. Ill at ease, we allow them to remove our shoes and anoint our feet with oils. Which they proceed to do, smiling and serene, without feeling humble. Will ancient custom ordain that we in turn should anoint their swarthy feet? I feel that it ought to be so. But what I find offensive is that they do not even expect it of us.

The dance is so placid that the hours stretch out inexorably. Will the programme never end? As I sit there trapped in that auditorium, they are free to torture me at their leisure, gradually revealing that naked feet possess the same expressive powers as hands, how dark skin is much more desirable, showing how people lived behind a Bible which is so immense that it is almost profane; mesmerizing me with the exhaustive repetition of the same truth. Until, by virtue of so much watching, I understand spices, galleons, and the odour of cinnamon. The importance of rivers becomes clear; cities are built along river-banks. The cymbal makes a sound which I can only describe as being *exotic*. The pure spirits can only be invoked with cymbals. The bells attached to the dancers' ankles and wrists convey with gentle tinkling the most subtle intentions of their bodies.

The names of the dancers are sweet and mellow, and fall easily on the ear. Mrinalini, Usha, Anirudda, Arjuna. Sweetness with a hint of bitterness and strangely familiar: have I already tasted these fruits? Perhaps when I was Eve and tasted the fruits in the Garden of Eden to relieve my boredom.

The musicians sit on the stage itself, their legs crossed as if they were practising yoga. The music is a plangent monologue which sounds like the wind when it begins to make one feel nervous. It is a monotonous cantilena which has been trans-

planted from wider spaces to the dimensions of the theatre; like a beast of the jungle, quietly pacing its cage. Among the musicians, there is a desperately thin man who is the cantor. His song is high-pitched and gives the impression of having been composed for warbling. It sends me slowly to sleep in my seat; like a snake, slowly hypnotizing me.

LIVING JELLY

This was a dream which made me sad and frightened. It began somewhere in the middle. There was a jelly which was alive. What were the jelly's feelings? Silence. Alive and silent, the jelly dragged itself with difficulty to the table, wobbling precariously without falling apart. Who touched it? No one had the courage. When I looked at it, I saw my own face mirrored there, slowly merging with the jelly's existence. Deformed in essence. Deformed without falling apart. I, too, barely alive. Plunged into horror, I wanted to escape the jelly. I went on to the terrace, prepared to throw myself from my top-floor apartment on to the street below. From my terrace I peered into the pitch-black night, and I was terrified at the thought of my approaching end: everything which is too strong by far appears to be nearing its end. But before jumping, I decided to put on some lipstick. It struck me that my lipstick was curiously soft. I then realized that my lipstick, too, was living jelly. And there I stood on the dark terrace, my lips moistened by this living substance.

My legs were already over the edge and I was just about to let go, when suddenly I saw the eyes of darkness. Not *eyes in the darkness* but the eyes of darkness. The darkness was watching me with two enormous eyes set wide apart. So the darkness, too, was alive. Where could I find death? For I knew that death was living jelly. Everything was alive. Everything is alive, primary and slow; everything is primarily immortal.

With almost insuperable difficulty, I succeeded in rousing myself, as if I were pulling myself by the hair in order to escape from that living quagmire.

I opened my eyes. The room was in darkness, but it was a familiar darkness, not the profound darkness from which I had dragged myself. I felt more peaceful. It had been nothing but a dream. Then I noticed that one of my arms was exposed. With a start, I pulled it under the sheet. No part of me should be exposed, if I still hoped to save myself. Did I want to save myself? I think so: then I switched on my bedside lamp in order to wake up properly. And I saw the room with its firm outlines. I had solidified the living jelly into a wall – I continued to feel I was

dreaming – I had solidified the living jelly into a ceiling; I had killed everything that could be killed in my efforts to restore the tranquillity of death around me; fleeing from what was worse than death: pure life, living jelly. I switched off the light. Suddenly a cockerel was crowing. A cockerel in an apartment block? A hoarse cockerel. In that white-washed building, a living cockerel? Outside, a freshly-painted building, and inside that cry? thus spoke the Book. Outside death – accomplished, pure, definitive, and inside the jelly, essentially alive. This was what I learned in the dead hours of night.

DANGEROUS LUCIDITY

My lucidity is so great that it annihilates me as a real and ordinary person; it is an empty lucidity and difficult to explain: like some perfect mathematical calculation which no one really needs. Nor do I understand what I understand: for I am infinitely greater than myself, and inaccessible. Besides: what am I to make of this lucidity? I also know that this lucidity of mine could become a human hell because I have experienced this before. And I know that – in terms of this daily and permanent resignation as we adjust to unreality – this clear vision of reality is fraught with danger. So put out my flame, oh Lord, because it is of no help to me as I live out my days. Restore me to an existence within my possibilities. To palpable existence. Amen.

GETTING TO SLEEP

When suffering from insomnia, I have invented a rather childish game to help me get to sleep. I talk quietly to myself, and it often works. The game, as I recall, is played as follows; I step back in time: I am a little girl once more. And when I go to bed, everyone sleeps with me. No harm can come to me. Everything is so cosy and reassuring. The soul is immortal. And no one ever dies. The pleasure of being a child is immense and sweet. God permeates my whole being: I can feel His tenderness go through me. It feels good, so good. God illumines all of me but in the shadows, so that His light may not disturb my sleep. As a child, I have no responsibilities: only privileges. The joy of being alive is to fall asleep. I can feel the sap of life slowly rising up my legs and arms. My soul has finally surrendered. I have nothing more to offer. Nothing detains me any longer: I am off. Reaching out for happiness. Happiness takes me by the hand. Happiness in life.

IN PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

And so much suffering, sometimes even unawares, because one is in pursuit of pleasure. I do not know how one can make pleasure come of its own accord. And it is so dramatic: you need only look at others in the semi-darkness of a night-club: the pursuit of pleasure which does not come alone or of its own volition. The pursuit of pleasure has brought the taste of rank water: I put my lips to the rusting tap. Two drops of lukewarm water come trickling out: the tap is dry. No, real suffering is better by far than forced pleasure.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

If my world were not human, there would still be a place for me: I would be a great blotch of instinct, affection and hatred, a tremulous irradiation of peace and conflict. If the world were not human, I should adjust quite happily to being an animal. For one brief moment I reject the human side of life and experience the mute soul of animal existence. It is good, it is true, it is the seed of what eventually becomes human.

EVEN THE TYPEWRITER?

I sent my typewriter to be repaired. When it came back there was a sheet of paper inserted in the roller (or whatever it is called). The repair-man had tried out a few letters to check if it was working properly. He had typed the following:

s d f g ç l k j a e v Praise be to God p oy 3 c .

THE PIANIST

He was small and slim and walked at a brisk pace as if his body were weightless. The receptionist in the boarding-house in Catete enthused with rapture: 'Oh, how wonderful to be able to express one's feelings through music!'

He would play late in the evening when most of the guests had retired to their rooms. In times gone by, he had probably played quite well, in terms of technique. As for *his feelings*, these were expressed in one of two registers: one minute *pianissimo*, the next *fortissimo*. He passed from the one to the other without any warning, which truly expressed the primitive emotions of the concierge. As for his own feelings, perhaps these two registers merely indicated a somewhat limited and monotonous range of emotions. And as for his physical appearance, his suit which belonged to someone else and had been delivered to the wrong room, made him look as if he were suspended from a coat-hanger. One shoulder was higher than the other, and while they were not exactly narrow, his shoulders somehow stooped, as if anxious to go unnoticed. It was not difficult to see that the suit was not his. 'From abroad?' someone inquired. 'Is he a foreigner?' another asked in reply. But he was no foreigner.

I forgot to mention that he looked albino. And he was short-sighted. Perhaps that explains indirectly why he could only play *pianissimo* or *fortissimo*; as if he relied on this crude contrast in order to be able *to see*. I knew him well. And he once came close to committing suicide but in the end he did not commit suicide. Perhaps he found a mid-way point between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo*. Like most people.

WHY?

One day a young man saw his girlfriend on the street chatting with two other girls. Why did he feel uneasy as if she had been lying and only now did he have the proof? Not that she had ever said she did not go out on her own or meet other girls for a laugh and a chat. But his image of her had been betrayed by this new

vision: in the company of her girlfriends, she seemed to become another person.

The worst of it was that she, too, felt uneasy when he mentioned he had seen her. She questioned him at length: What was I doing? How was I dressed? Did you see me laughing? And he felt that if he could explain himself – but he could not – he would demand that she should no longer meet her girlfriends. She would wrongly assume that he was jealous. The idea that she could foolishly see herself in a favourable light and believe herself so precious as to arouse his jealousy, made him pity and despise her.

Since discovering this new facet of her nature as she stood there chatting with her girlfriends on the street, he somehow found her absurd and despicable. And puzzled by his own reactions, he tried to justify them: she had looked just like one of those housemaids who wash up after lunch, dry their chilblained hands, and escape on to the streets for a good gossip. But none of this was true and, try as he might, he was not convinced by his own arguments. Only he now remained cold when she confided her dream from the night before. He would look at her with open eyes devoid of any affection, wide open in order to keep her at bay, as if he were saying: Do you really think you can fool me? You are no longer the same person. Not since I saw you chatting on the street.

From then on, there was no genuine understanding between them and their love affair did not last long. It ended abruptly, with no regrets.

STILL IMPOSSIBLE

I replied that what I really wanted was to be able to write a story one day that would begin like this: 'Once upon a time...' 'A story for children?' they asked me. 'No, for adults', I replied distractedly, trying to recall my first stories written at the age of seven. They all began with: 'Once upon a time...', and I would send them off to the editor of the Children's Page in the *Jornal de Recife* [Recife Daily News]. Not a single one of those stories was ever published. And even then it was easy to see why. None of those stories actually had a plot. I used to read all the stories which appeared on the Children's Page and they all narrated some episode or other. But if the editor persisted in rejecting

my stories, I was just as persistent.

Time passed and I had changed so much that I thought to myself: perhaps I am now ready for that real 'Once upon a time...'. And so I asked myself: Why not make a start? Immediately? It shouldn't be too difficult, I thought to myself.

And so I began. Yet no sooner had I written the first sentence, than I realized it was still impossible. All I had managed to write was: 'Once upon a time there was a bird, dear God.'

SUMMER BALL

Fanning herself, the fat matron is lost in thought. The fan helps her to think as she sits there fanning herself rigorously. Then with a sudden click, she abruptly arrests her thoughts. Empty, smiling, rigid in her tight corset, she looks distracted. The fan reclines distracted and open on her ample bosom. 'No doubt, they'll all find a husband', she concedes like a visitor being received in a drawing-room. But suppressing her agitation, there she is fanning herself with a thousand sparrows' wings.

A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE IN ITALY

The men have crimson lips and produce offspring. The women become deformed from constant breast-feeding. As for the elderly, the elderly do not betray any emotion. The work is strenuous. The night, silent. There are no cinemas. Standing in doorways, the beauty of the young women is to wait there in the shadows. Life is sad and abundant, as one would expect life to be in the mountains.

PATIO IN TIJUCA

In the Northern Zone a warm wind blows. In the patio five girls with pale skin have already taken their afternoon bathe, and are drying their hair in the sirocco wind. They have black eyes, shapely arms and colourless lips. They are the daughters of the household. Why speak? Sit down and play your guitars. There is nothing to say to them. In that household there is nothing to salvage. Certain things have no real meaning. Yet they are no less important. These are simply five girls with colourless lips whom I leave right here in the patio, where they will remain. And, if they do not wish to stay here, they are free to go elsewhere. Five girls with pale skin are five girls with pale skin. I observe this harem of colourless lips, selected by nature without cruelty or love. Indulging neither in politics nor poetry,

I find it neither right nor wrong: that's how it is.

But naturally the sirocco brings horses and sandstorms from the desert.

THE CONTENTED COOK

She could not read, so I read the letter out to her. 'Sweet Teresa, I adore you. You are always in my heart. From the moment I first set eyes on you, my heart was captivated by your charms. On seeing you so tender and beautiful, My Soul was troubled, for until that moment my life had been empty and sad. Suddenly I was full of life and hope and the flame of love burned in my heart. The love you aroused in me, Teresa, my beloved, is illumined by your purity and there it will discover the depth of my sincerity. We shall find such happiness together one day, our hearts beating together, united by the joys and sorrows of life. Your warm heart there to comfort me, your pure soul to adore me. I raise to heaven a sweet ballad of love dedicated to my beloved Teresa, who is always in my dreams. From your ever adoring Edgar. I beseech a reply from my beloved Teresa. My address is: Estrada São Luiz, 30-C, Santa Cruz.'

THINGS WERE PERFECT BEFORE

Just to have been born has ruined my health.

SHADY DEALINGS

After I discovered in myself how people think, I was no longer able to believe in the thoughts of others.

OUT OF DISCRETION

God has bestowed innumerable small gifts upon him, which he has neither used nor exploited for fear of becoming perfect and ostentatious.

MY NEXT EXCITING VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD

Tomorrow I leave for Europe. From where I shall be submitting material for this column.

I shall be based in London. And from there I shall plan several trips. For example, a trip to Paris to see the Mona Lisa again, a painting which is often in my thoughts. And I shall buy some perfume. And lodge a complaint with Maison Carven which no longer manufactures *Vert et Blanc*, my favourite perfume. I shall also go to the Comédie Française. And explore the Left Bank.

Then I shall return to London where I shall remain for several weeks before setting out for my beloved Italy. First to Rome, then to Florence.

Once in Rome, some mutual acquaintances will arrange a meeting with Onassis. Who knows? He might take me on a cruise round the Mediterranean.

I shall travel on to Greece which I do not know well. And I really must see the Acropolis again.

I also want to take another look at the Pyramids and the Sphinx. The Sphinx has always intrigued me. This time I intend to confront her, fairly and squarely, face to face. I want to see who devours whom. Perhaps nothing will happen. Because the Sphinx must find mankind just as enigmatic and impossible to decipher. Besides, she cannot even decipher herself. And if we human beings were capable of deciphering ourselves, we would hold the key to life.

I want to bathe in the sea at Biarritz when the waves are high, the sea so dense, green and turbulent. It is quite magnificent. I have no desire to revisit San Sebastian.

But I do want to go back to Toledo and Cordoba. In Toledo I shall study the paintings of El Greco.

In Europe it is already spring. As good a reason as any for making this trip. I shall visit Israel, so ancient and yet so modern: I am anxious to see how people there reconcile the values of the past and present.

And Portugal? I must revisit Lisbon and Cascais. In Lisbon I shall visit my dear friend, Natércia Freire, who writes wonderful poetry. And I shall give her the article she requested for the

Literary Supplement of the *Diário de Notícias* [Daily News] which she edits in Lisbon. I shall climb the Chiado. And reminisce about Eça de Queirós. I must start rereading his novels. One could never tire of that exquisite prose, which never loses its freshness.

From there I shall return to London for two weeks of relaxation, going to the theatre and frequenting the city's pubs.

I am also planning a brief visit to Monrovia in Liberia. I have already been to Liberia, but have never seen the capital.

In case anyone starts thinking I have won the sweepstake, let me explain. The best thing about this story is that I shall not spend one penny on the trip. Any expenses will be purely personal. I shall tell you later how to go about getting this wonderful bargain: it is not impossible and to prove it, I myself managed with no great effort. No, I did not deploy any special *charm*. Any *charm* on my part is quite involuntary and unconscious. It simply happens. The *charm* I mean.

By then I shall be anxious to get back to Brazil. I shall return via New York, where I shall stay for two weeks getting lost in the crowd. There is nothing like downtown New York for making one feel solitary. If the solitude becomes too much for me, I shall contact the Brazilian Consulate. To be with Brazilians again and to be able to converse in my native tongue. A difficult but fascinating language. Especially when it comes to writing. Believe me, it is not easy to write in Portuguese. Not particularly refined in terms of thought, our language is somewhat inflexible when one is trying to express certain subtleties in human sensibility.

And at last, I shall be on my way back to Rio. But not before making a short stop-over in Belém do Pará to look up old friends such as Francisco Paulo Mendes, Benedito Nunes and other dear friends (if I can find their addresses in time). I hope they have not forgotten me. For I certainly have not forgotten them. I once spent six blissful months in Belém for which I shall be eternally grateful to that city.

Once back in Rio and reunited with my family and friends, I shall escape to Cabo Frio where I shall spend a few days with Pedro and Miriam Bloch. This will give me a chance to rest before returning to Rio to resume the daily struggle: a deeply personal struggle away from the public gaze.

Yes. I shall visit all these places.

But only if the trip comes off...

For this is April Fool's Day and even as a child I could never

manage to fool anyone. Alas, I have no hope of making this trip without money. And I only mentioned Onassis because, as everyone knows, he is always gatecrashing.

To be frank, I am not the least bit interested in meeting him.

Forgive me, but I simply could not resist this little joke.

THE GRATUITOUS ACT

What has often saved me has been to improvise some gratuitous act. If any reasons exist for such an act, they are unknown. And if there are any consequences, they are unforeseen.

A gratuitous act is the opposite of our struggle for life. It is the opposite of our frantic pursuit of money, work, love, pleasure, taxis, buses, our daily existence in short. And there is a price to be paid for all of this.

One afternoon, not so long ago, I was typing away under a blue sky flecked with tiny clouds, white as white could be, when suddenly I felt something inside me.

A sudden weariness of this perpetual struggle.

And I realized I was thirsty. A thirst for freedom had stirred inside me. I was simply weary of living in an apartment. I was weary of extracting ideas from myself. I was weary of listening to my typewriter. And then this strange, deep thirst had appeared. I suddenly felt an urgent need to make a bid for freedom. An act which needs no justification. An act capable of showing, quite independently of me, what I was really like inside. And this called for an act which would *have to be paid for.* I do not mean *paid for in money*, but paid for in broader terms, at the high price it costs to live.

Then my own thirst guided me. It was two o'clock on a summer's afternoon. I interrupted my work, quickly changed, went downstairs and hailed a taxi. I told the taxi-driver: Drop me off at the Botanical Gardens. 'Where is that?' he asked. 'You don't understand', I explained, 'It's not a street or district. I mean *the* Botanical Gardens.' This was enough to make him peer at me for a second.

I left the taxi windows open as it gathered speed and sat back to enjoy my freedom as a sharp gust of wind blew my hair about and grazed my grateful cheeks, my eyes half-closed with happiness.

Why had I chosen the Botanical Gardens? Just to look. To see things. To feel them. Just to live.

I leapt out of the taxi and went through the wide gates. Into the welcoming shade. I stood there motionless. Green life in those gardens was so abundant. I could see no meanness there:

everything gave itself completely to the wind, to the atmosphere, to life, everything reached for the sky. And what is more: also surrendered its mystery.

Mystery surrounded me. I looked at the delicate shrubs which had just been planted. I gazed at a tree with its dark, gnarled trunk which was so wide my arms would never be able to embrace it. How could sap flow inside this solid wood, through those heavy roots, hard as claws? Sap, this almost intangible substance which is also life. For there is sap in everything just as there is blood in our veins.

I shall not describe what I saw there. Everyone must discover it for themselves. All I will say is that there were swaying, secret shadows. In passing, I shall touch briefly on the freedom of the birds. And on my freedom. But that is all. The rest was a moist green rising inside me through unknown roots. I walked and walked. Sometimes I would pause. I had left the main gates far behind me, and they were already out of sight as I explored a labyrinth of tree-lined avenues. I felt pleasantly apprehensive – the tiniest tremor in my soul – the nervous thrill of perhaps being lost and of never, but never more, being able to find the exit.

There was a fountain where water played incessantly. The water spouted from the mouth of a head carved in stone. I drank some water and got completely drenched. This did not worry me. Such nonchalance seemed in keeping with the abundance in those Gardens.

Here and there the ground was covered with tiny pods from the pepper-trees, those pods one found scattered on the pavements as children and instinctively trampled with the greatest satisfaction. As I trampled them again after all these years, the same sense of satisfaction came back to me: mysterious yet such a comfort.

I began to feel pleasantly tired. It was time to go home. The sun was no longer warm.

I shall return one day when there is heavy rain, just to see that dripping garden submerged.

PS: Could I ask the kind person who converts my column into Braille for the blind to omit this particular article. I have no desire to offend eyes which cannot see.

TWO HEARTS BEATING FAST

My friend was talking to me on the telephone. When all of a sudden a little bird flew into her sitting-room. My friend recognized it at once: it was a *sabiá* or Brazilian thrush. The maid got a terrible fright, my friend was simply taken by surprise. The bird would have to find its way back to the window to escape. After much fluttering, the bird settled on top of a picture above my friend's head while she continued her telephone conversation. But she was paying more attention to the *sabiá* than to what she was saying.

Suddenly she felt something land on her bare shoulder – it was summer – and she was wearing a strapless dress: the *sabiá* had settled on her shoulder and seemed perfectly happy there. I should also mention that my friend has a most melodious voice. She knew that any abrupt movement on her part would startle the poor creature. So moving very quietly she put down the receiver.

I should also mention that my friend has the most delicate way of handling things. She is capable of caressing the corolla of a flower without causing any damage. And so with the greatest care she picked up the *sabiá* which put up no resistance.

And there the bird remained nestled in her hand. Its tiny little heart was beating fast. And to make matters worse my friend's heart also began to beat abnormally. And there they were, the two of them trembling for all they were worth; my friend listening to her own heart pounding away while feeling the rapid heartbeat of the *sabiá*.

She got up very slowly in her efforts to calm the little bird and began making her way to the window. The *sabiá* seemed to understand. My friend then opened her hand. The bird remained still for a few seconds. Then suddenly took flight, beautiful to behold in all its freedom.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

I got into a taxi but before it could drive off, a young man

appeared, young but with thinning hair which was already flecked with grey. He popped his head through the window and inquired:

– Are you by any chance going my way?

I told him I was heading for Copacabana. He then asked me in a plaintive voice: Would you mind giving me a lift? I live in the same direction and at this hour it's impossible to find a taxi. I told him to get in. He sat beside the driver. Turning round in his seat, he then proceeded to bombard me with endless chatter: he was married and extremely happy; he did not mind in the least that his wife was beginning to age because he still loved her dearly, and he had sent her some roses that very morning. No, it was not her birthday or some special anniversary, simply to tell her that he loved her... Well, well – I thought to myself – here is one man who deceives his wife at the first opportunity.

All this talk about conjugal love was beginning to get on my nerves, not to mention that unctuous voice of his, as he lied through his teeth about his private life, oblivious to my lack of interest. Suddenly he announced: You can drop me off right here. The taxi came to a halt, he got out, popped his head through the window and had the affrontery to whisper in my ear:

– The lady is a perfect gentleman.

REFUGE

I have a lovely picture in my mind, which I can conjure up at will, and it invariably comes back to me in its entirety. It is the image of a forest, and in that forest I can see a green clearing, enveloped in semi-darkness and surrounded by tall trees. And in the midst of this pleasing darkness there are many butterflies, and a tawny lion is reclining, while I sit embroidering on the ground nearby. The hours pass like countless years, and the years pass in reality; the large butterflies have decorative wings and the tawny lion is speckled but the speckles are only there to show that he is tawny, and from the speckles one can see what the lion would look like if he were not tawny. The nice thing about this image is the penumbra, which demands nothing beyond my powers of vision. And there I sit with butterfly and lion. My clearing has a wealth of minerals: these consist of colours. There is only one danger: the dread knowledge that outside the clearing I am lost. For it will no longer be the forest (something love has already taught me) but only an empty field (which fear has taught me): so empty that I might just as easily go in one direction as in the other, a wilderness so devoid of cover and concealment that I should never be able to find an animal there to call my own. I put my fears aside, take a deep breath to regain my composure and settle down to enjoy my intimacy with the lion and the butterflies; we do not think, we simply enjoy ourselves. In this image-cum-refuge I am not black and white. Even without being able to see myself, I know that to these creatures I am coloured; without exceeding their powers of vision for that would unsettle them and we are in no sense unsettling. I am speckled with blue and green simply to show that I am neither blue nor green. Just look at what I am not! The penumbra is dark green and moist. I know that I have mentioned this already, but I am repeating it out of happiness: I want to repeat it over and over again. Until we actually feel that we are there. And really enjoying ourselves. Truly, I have never been so contented. Why? What does it matter? Each of us is in the right place, and I am perfectly happy with mine. I cannot resist repeating myself for things are getting better all the time: the

tame lion, and the butterflies flitting quietly as I sit on the ground embroidering. We are thoroughly enjoying our clearing in the forest. We are contented.

STYLE

– What's that you're writing?
– I am typing a request.
– Let me see. Did you really write this? 'The undersigned requests of your Excellency...' That's really posh, Mum, you've never written like that before.

ONE STEP HIGHER: SILENCE

Until today, I did not know, so to speak, that one can live without writing. Little by little the thought crept up on me: Who knows? Perhaps I, too, might be able to live without writing. That is infinitely more ambitious. And virtually impossible.

A FLOWER BEWITCHED AND TOO BRIGHT BY FAR

I swear, believe me – the drawing-room was in darkness – but the music summoned me to the centre of the room – there was something lurking there – the entire room grew dark within the darkness – I was in darkness – yet I felt that, however dark, the room was bright – I took refuge in my own fear – just as I had already taken refuge from you in you yourself – what did I find? – nothing except that the dark room lit up with the brightness of a smile – and that it was inherent in the flower – I was trembling in the centre of this awkward light – believe me, even though I cannot explain – it was as if I had never seen a flower – it was something perfect and full of grace which seemed superhuman, but was life – and I nervously pretended that the flower was the soul of someone who had just died – I invented this because I did not have the strength to look directly at the life of a flower – and I looked at that bright centre whose energy was so light that it appeared to stir and become dislocated – and the flower was as vibrant as if a menacing bee were hovering overhead – a bee frozen by fear? – no – it would be more accurate to say that the excited bee and flower were meeting – one life up against another, one life on behalf of another – or frozen by fear before the suffocating grace of this flickering candle which was the flower – I was the bee – and the flower trembled before the dangerous sweetness of the bee – believe me, even if I myself cannot explain it – some fatal rite was being accomplished – the room was filled with that penetrating smile – yet it was nothing more than the whitening of shadows – there was no remaining proof of what I had experienced – I can swear to nothing – I am the only proof of myself – and by giving myself I can explain what I alone witnessed – I cannot understand how anyone could be afraid of a rose – for that flower was a rose – I have had the same experience with violets which were extremely delicate – but I was afraid – they smelled of the grave – and the flowers and bee already summon me – alas I cannot refuse – I am being summoned – and at heart I truly want to go – this rash encounter with a flower is my encounter with my destiny.

– May I speak freely?
– Of course.
– Will you understand?
– I will. I do not know much. But there are certain advantages in not knowing. Like virgin territory, the mind is free of preconceptions. Everything I do not know forms the greater and better part of me: this is my largesse. And with this I understand everything. The things I do not know constitute my truth.

MOTHERS' DAY

I once performed – a dancer from the *corps de ballet* at Rio's Municipal Theatre confided – without knowing that I was pregnant. Afterwards I felt so guilty, but it was a slow piece without difficult movements. When I realized what I had done, I went immediately to have a check-up. You cannot imagine my relief when the doctor assured me there was nothing to worry about. I felt so relieved and overjoyed that I hugged and kissed the poor man who looked quite startled as I thanked him profusely. I was behaving as if the doctor himself were the father.

As she spoke, the sun was setting. The dancer looked terribly fragile, light as a feather and with hardly any breasts.

– But the doctor felt he must warn me that my womb was so tiny I might lose the child. I followed his advice and rested as much as possible, conversing with the tiny mite inside me. I would say to him: 'Listen, my little one, we must win through together. I'm determined you'll be born, come what may.' It was almost as if my little son could hear me and was trying to tell me: 'I'm finding it all so difficult.' How I longed to hear him crying as if he were responding to life. For the living respond with their tears. We would converse for hours. No one would have understood my painful ecstasy, then or later.

We remained silent. She was sitting on the red carpet, so very fragile, her legs crossed in the lotus position. Her training as a ballet dancer had taught her how to sit proud and erect.

– Then I started losing blood. I could hardly believe it: refused to believe it. And the more blood I lost, the more desperate I became. Until the worst finally happened: I lost my baby. It was a little boy. I insisted on being allowed to see him: there he lay, nestling inside the membrane. Just like a fledgling I once saw with the tiniest body, almost transparent and with an enormous beak. I felt as if I had given birth to a little bird. I began to weep. I was not giving vent to my disappointment. I was mourning the death of my new-born child. Everyone told me: 'But Gisele, the child was not yet fully formed, it was only a foetus...' No one seemed to understand that for a woman as small as I am that foetus was a child. And they were even more puzzled when I

asked my father to bury the corpse in our garden. I was determined my child would not be thrown on to some rubbish dump. For it was legally forbidden to bury still-born babies in a public cemetery. On seeing how depressed I was, my father agreed, and buried my child in the garden beneath an enormous almond-tree. It was autumn and the leaves were already turning yellow.

As she spoke, I could see the grave in that garden harbouring the tiny creature coiled up inside its fragile membrane and slowly rotting away. I said nothing.

– The most unbearable thing of all has been this feeling of guilt. Can you imagine, there I was dancing in that condition. But at other moments, I see things differently: You were not to blame, I keep telling myself, it was not the dancing but my tiny womb and the baby would have died just the same. Yet I cannot help feeling that I did not do enough for him, that something was missing.

Dusk was falling: we were sitting in semi-darkness but I refrained from switching on any lights.

– But I won't give up – she whispered.

– Won't give up what?

– Trying to have a baby. The doctor has warned me I could lose it a second time, but I won't give up: I don't care how long it takes and, I'm prepared to take the risk. Until I can finally carry a child safely inside me for nine long months, giving him the best of everything to eat and drink from my nourished blood. Until the day comes when he is born at last. And we shall share that victory. No one needs to tell me how difficult it is to give birth.

I peered at her through the shadows. Resigned, broken, courageous. Yes, she was a mother all right, this dancer by Degas.

WITHOUT ANY WARNING

There were so many things which I did not know at the time. No one had told me, for example, about this fierce sun at three o'clock in the afternoon. Nor had anyone told me about this dry rhythm of living, this relentless dust. They had vaguely warned me it might be painful. But I had no idea that what would bring me hope from afar would spread over me like an eagle's wing. I had no idea what it meant to be protected by great outspread, menacing wings, an eagle's beak lowered towards me and smiling. In adolescence, when I triumphantly wrote in my diary that I did not believe in love, that was precisely when I loved most of all. I had no idea how harmful lies could be. I began to lie as a precaution, and because no one warned me about the danger of being wary, I was no longer able to rid myself of the habit of lying. And I told so many lies that I began to lie even to my very lies. And this – I was amazed to discover – was the same as telling the truth. Until I became so degenerate that I would tell the most shameless lies: I was telling the naked truth.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN (EXTRACT)

So this was happiness. To begin with she felt empty. Then her eyes became moist: this was happiness, but since I am mortal, this love for the world transcends me. Love for this mortal life was gently killing her little by little. And what does one do when one is happy? What do I make of happiness? What am I to make of this strange, penetrating tranquillity which is already beginning to cause me anguish like some great silence? To whom shall I give this happiness of mine which is beginning to frighten me and tear me apart? No, she did not want to be happy. For fear of entering some unknown territory. She preferred the humdrum life she knew. Afterwards she tried to laugh in order to mask her awesome and fatal choice. And pretending to be amused, she thought: To be happy? God offers nuts to those without teeth. But she was not amused. She was sad and thoughtful. She was returning to the death of everyday existence.

THE GIFT

...Perhaps love is to give one's own solitude to others? For it is the very last thing we have to offer.

TO EAT

The food was awful, but there was one good thing: it would revive me for some better meal in the future whenever that might be.

Blanquette de Veau. We went to the restaurant with the sole intention of eating well. We were more interested in food than any conversation. When the *maître* recommended *Blanquette de Veau*, something told me I should choose something else. I brought up the same old excuse that I did not really care for anything with a white sauce. My friend, who is a great gourmand, assured me that a white sauce is not to be despised. So we decided to compromise and share any risk by ordering one *Blanquette* and one *Tournedos* cooked in a wine sauce.

When the food arrived, I set about sampling it and after the first few mouthfuls, I felt there was something wrong.

I asked my friend hesitantly: Don't you get the impression that something here has been burnt? There is a slight taste of something charred. I could not decide what it was because in my hunger I had chewed everything together. Whereupon my friend tried to reassure me: The rice has probably been *overcooked*.

As for the *Blanquette*. Certain dishes, when they are too refined, provoke nausea. Excessive refinement makes one almost feel like being sick. Besides, there should always be a touch of simplicity in good cooking.

As for the *Tournedos*, that was another mistake. Good meat should give one something to chew on! And any fillet of beef which cuts like butter is a clear warning that the waiter has not heeded my instructions.

This was enough to make me lose my appetite. And nothing could take away the sense of disappointment. I felt quite frustrated, and in a fuming rage I inwardly vowed never to eat again.

For I am so immature that I cannot bear to have my pleasures spoiled. 'So much for eating well', I said bitterly to my friend. 'Be patient', she told me calmly, 'your appetite will come back'. Her own mother is such a wise and practical woman that, whenever there is illness in the family, she immediately does two important things: she administers medicine and then goes off to her room to pray. And then all is well.

But that is another story. To end the first one, my appetite did come back eventually. But as for *Blanquette de Veau* – never again. And I am not joking.

A MAN ON HIS KNEES

It seems only right. And the woman knows that it is good for him. After so many great feats and struggles he realizes it is his duty to kneel before the woman. He finds it comforting to rest his head on the woman's knees, her lap offering him warmth. And with loving hands, trembling yet firm, she brings that weary head to her heart.

FINAL SURRENDER

It is pleasant to open one's hands and allow to flow freely that emptiness-cum-fullness which one was cruelly holding back. Then suddenly to discover to one's amazement: I have opened my hands and heart and am losing nothing! And then sudden fear. Wake up! for there is danger in having one's heart so free.

Until one perceives that in this expansiveness lies the perilous pleasure of existing. And there is a strange reassurance: always having something to squander. So hold back nothing of this emptiness-cum-fullness. Squander it.

DEVILISH IMAGININGS

Across the heavens came the most tranquil strains of music. The madness of tranquillity. Landscape? Nothing but air, green stems, an extended sea, the silence of dawn on a Sunday morning. A man, slightly built, with only one foot and an enormous, transparent eye stuck in the middle of his forehead. A female creature approaches on all fours, and asks in a voice from another age, a voice which is deep, awkward and euphoric: 'Would you like some tea?' Clearly the habit of some previous life. She picks a slender spike, the colour of gold – probably corn – and sticks it between toothless gums before crawling away with her eyes wide open. Eyes which, like her nose, never move. The creature has no neck. She has to turn her boneless head in order to fix her eye on an object. Object? What object? There are no objects. The thin man has fallen asleep on his foot, his one eye still open: sleeping for him is a question of wishing or not wishing to see. When he does not see, he is asleep. Meadow and rainbow are reflected in that quiescent eye. It is the eye or wing of an insect. Hovering above the void there is wonder. Those strains of music return. Someone is examining their nails. Hissing sounds can be heard in the distance. But it would never occur to the one-footed man that someone was calling him. A sound nearby penetrates the strains of music without so much as a tremor. The sound returns and starts to wear down the rock like dripping water. It is a high-pitched sound without any overtones. Some joyful dirge? The note is soaring and ecstatic. The vibrations shrill. No man on Earth could hear it without going wild with joy and smiling. But the one-eyed man continues to sleep on his feet. And that toothless female creature which crawls on all fours is stretched out on the shore, thinking of the great void. A third person crosses the desert and goes off limping into the distance. The hissing sounds return. But no one pays any attention. Who is calling? And who are they calling?

Hemingway and Camus were both excellent journalists without prejudicing their works of fiction. In my own modest way, this is what I myself would like to achieve if I could work up sufficient energy.

But I am afraid: writing too much can contaminate words. If one sold or made shoes, there would be less risk of ruining words. Undisturbed, they would remain intact. What a pity I do not know how to make shoes.

There is another problem: when writing for a newspaper, one cannot forget the reader whereas when writing fiction, the writer can speak with greater freedom and independence.

A journalist from Belo Horizonte once told me how surprised he was to discover that some people found my novels and short stories difficult to read but had no problems in understanding my weekly column, however complicated the theme. I once wrote an article about the state of grace, a subject which, by its very nature, does not make for easy reading, yet I later discovered to my astonishment, that it ended up inside somebody's missal. Would you believe it!

I told the journalist that a reader's comprehension is largely a question of approach and attitude and the absence of any preconceived ideas. And the readers of this newspaper who are used to reading it from page to page without any great difficulty, are predisposed to understanding everything. And this is simply because *any newspaper is meant to be understood.* That said, I must admit that I put rather more effort into my fiction than into these weekly articles, much as I enjoy writing them for readers whom I respect and regard with affection.

NO MORE WORRIES

– Everyone knows that sprinkling salt on the fire or hiding a broom behind the door can get rid of unwelcome guests.

– Everyone knows that a red ribbon tied round the patient's waist can arrest the progress of erysipilas.

– Likewise, if you hang a red handkerchief up in the bedroom, it can cause a vicious attack of measles.

– There is nothing better for curing hiccoughs than to take nine sips of water without pausing for breath. Or to turn up your sleeves. In the case of an infant, a tiny piece of damp cotton-wool should be placed on its forehead.

– If you bury chayote in the soil early in the morning, it will remove warts.

– If you spill sugar on the table, sprinkle a few grains on your chest and you will almost certainly come into money.

– Spilling salt brings bad luck, unless you throw a little over your left shoulder.

– Touching wood to ward off all evils is something everybody knows.

– To make sure that duck turns out tasty when cooked, it should be plucked in total silence. And to make sure that chicken is really tender and succulent, put three chick-peas or a clove into the pot.

– A sea-horse, on the other hand, relieves asthma.

– And anyone with sweaty hands need only catch a toad and hold it for a few seconds and the perspiration will vanish.

– It is common knowledge that crossed knives can provoke a quarrel and the same is true if one passes salt across the table.

– A broken mirror should be thrown into the sea.

– Hats should never be placed on top of a bed or shoes placed under a chair.

– It is always better to put the right shoe on before the left one.

– A lock of hair should be tucked into the hem of a bride's dress.

– On departing, one should always leave by the same door one entered by.

– Anyone who sweeps the house at night and throws out the rubbish is also in danger of throwing out good fortune.

– When the hem of a dress gets caught accidentally, it is advisable to bite it in order to get a new dress.

– Yellow is the colour of leap year.

– In order to safeguard the health of young children, one should tie a tiny sachet round their neck filled with tiny lizards' tails.

– A stolen statue of St Anthony will get any spinster to the altar.

– Itching in the right palm is a sign that money is on the way.

– One should pay in coin when given a handkerchief or a knife as a present.

– A glass of cold water with three pinches of salt will ward off the evil eye.

– Certain looks can cause sweet-peppers to shrivel up.

– When you lose something, tie a ribbon or piece of string to the arm of a chair or the leg of a table, to the handle of a jug, round a lamp, or whatever, and keep the *little demon* tied up securely until the lost object is found.

– Crosses marked with chalk on the soles of your shoes can prevent them from squeaking.

– A piece of cork in the frying-pan turns the food a golden brown.

– Never open an umbrella indoors.

– Any little black bird coming through the window brings misfortune.

– A St George's cross on the right-hand side of one's front door keeps trouble at bay.

Now then, if you start putting all these precepts into practice, you will have no more worries.

MORTALLY WOUNDED

Flying over the grimy roof-tops, you drag your broken wing in flight. Above the church the echoes of the bells reject you and send you panting to the sandy shore. You can no longer bear a consoling embrace, for love restricts your injured wing. You fly off through the air, squawking in fright, your blood spilling on to the roof-tops. Fly, fly to the horrors of solitude, rest on the rock, lay out the wounded creature nestling in your body: your most innocent wing has been hit. But the city fascinates you. You fly on, white and lugubrious, carrying what has become most precious of all: suffering. You circle like a vulture over the roof-tops. Your ashen wing drooping against the darkness of night which has grown ashen with terror. You fly courageously over the fortified and darkened city, over chapel, bridge, cemetery, shuttered shops, moribund gardens, quiescent forest, a sheet of newspaper flying over a forgotten street. There is such silence from the square tower. You spy the remote fortress. No, no, do not descend, stop pretending the pain has gone. Useless to ignore your broken wing. Fallen archangel, you have nowhere to rest. Flee, ghastly spectre, flee while there is still time: try to extend that broken wing. Escape, accept that wound and plunge your broken wing into the sea.

THE WHITE ROSE

Proud bloom. And such perfection. A cathedral moulded in crystal. Petal layered on petal and inaccessible. Voices soar in unison, first two, then a third, a fifth, a ninth: the voices of wise children greeting the dawn and singing their praises in chorus, the delicate spirit, the inviolable surface of a rose.

I stretch out my left hand which is weaker and more delicate, a swarthy hand which I immediately withdraw blushing. I cannot bring myself to touch you. If only I could find the words to describe your knowing presence and tranquil beauty.

I try to dismiss any memories, to see you as the dawn sees you, as a chair sees you, as another flower sees you. (Fear not,

I have no desire to possess you.) I reach up, reach up to inhale your perfume. I reach up in an attempt to achieve my own image, to confront my own appearance. I turn pale in this startled and precious region and come close to touching your divine perfection...before collapsing into a ridiculous heap on the ground.

I refuse to accept defeat: I want at least to suffer your victory with the angelic suffering of your harmony and happiness. But my insensitive heart grieves me as if I were pining for a lover. And from my clumsy hands come words of shame.

PLAYING WITH MERCURY

It always has been and always will be a red-letter day for me when a thermometer gets broken and the silver mercury spills on to the floor, runs a little way and then becomes immobilised and impregnable. I have just broken another one and I try to retrieve the mercury with the help of a sheet of paper which I cautiously slip underneath. But it resists all my efforts. No sooner do I think I have succeeded than it disintegrates between my fingers like damp fireworks. Not unlike what apparently happens to us humans after death, when the energy escapes from our soul and merges with the atmosphere. How hopeless trying to collect that sensitive liquid. It refuses to be handled and maintains its integrity even when divided into innumerable little bubbles: each tiny bubble is a separate entity, whole and entire, even when divided. One only has to prod one of those bubbles very gently for it to be sucked in by another next to it and together they form a larger and rounder bubble. Ever since childhood I have had this same dream whenever I break a thermometer. I dream of thousands of broken thermometers and of an endless stream of dense, lunar, cold mercury spilling all over. And there I am, serious and absorbed, as I play with the living matter of this vast expanse of silver metal. I imagine myself sinking into this pool of mercury which has escaped from the thermometers. As I sink deeper, thousands of bubbles are released, one by one, thick and impenetrable. Mercury is an impregnable substance. In what sense impregnable? I cannot explain. I refuse to explain. There is nothing to explain. Mercury is impregnable and that is that. It seems to possess a cerebral coolness which controls its reaction. I feel as if I am in love with mercury but mercury feels nothing for me. There is none of that submissiveness one expects from material things. For mercury has a life of its own. Coping with mercury is not like coping with other material things. It submits to no one. And no one is allowed to handle it. Our soul uses our body in order to avoid being contaminated by life and this tiny gleaming nucleus is the ultimate refuge of mankind. Wild beasts also possess this shining nucleus which helps to keep them completely wild and alive.

I see that I have moved on from mercury to the mystery of wild beasts. The fact is that mercury – which constitutes lunar matter – causes me to think, leads me from one truth to another, until I come to the nucleus of that purity and integrity which each of us possesses. Who? I ask. Who has not played with a broken thermometer?

FROM VILA ISABEL TO BRAZIL

I received a telephone call from someone who was most insistent that I should help to publicize the inauguration of the newly-founded National Poetry Club.

I am not very enthusiastic about any such club, firmly believing that poetry, like all other creative pursuits, should not be institutionalized. The writer or artist engages in solitary communion with the unknown reader who sometimes reveals himself and who for one brief second confronts our weary heart, worn down by the sheer effort of living.

But somehow I had confidence in the sixteen-year-old youth who made the call from Vila Isabel, where he lives. Coming straight to the point, he asked me to mention this important event in my column. Important for him, at least. And for his sake, I am trying to work up some sympathy for this group of young poets in Vila Isabel who believe in a national club to foster poetry.

So allow me formally to announce the inauguration of the National Poetry Club in response to a bold request from this timid young poet who lives in Vila Isabel. Had he and his fellow poets been more courageous, they might have insisted that it should be international rather than simply national. Poetry is about to be institutionalized, perhaps as an organized response to this so-called *consumer society* of ours. The young poet appears to be saying: 'I am a poet and this is the only expedient left to me in my struggle to survive.' And, not content with asserting himself at the not so precocious age of sixteen, he wants to involve the whole of Brazil in this ingenuous manifesto launched in all good faith. (I once apologized to Carlos Drummond de Andrade for being so ingenuous and he consoled me by assuring me that ingenuousness is nothing to be ashamed of. Did you hear that, young man? So don't take offence.) There is something wholesome and endearing about this youth. I am

ashamed of my scepticism about the usefulness of any such club for poets. And anxious to make amends for my lack of enthusiasm, I am now going to try and support the idea although I am somewhat amused by the Club's manifesto. Let us by all means inaugurate a National Poetry Club if this is the only way of nurturing poetry. But now that poetry has been institutionalized by these young poets from Vila Isabel, let us inaugurate love to combat the solitude of those who defend their individuality amidst the faceless multitude who live like robots. By decree of these young poets, we are free. That is fine by me. And I have no hesitation in accepting my new-found freedom.

BRASÍLIA PAST AND PRESENT

I had a conversation with Paulo and Gisela Magalhães. They are both architects and have lived and worked in Brasília. I asked them to tell me about their work in the new capital and about life in general in Brasília, which I last visited many years ago.

Paulo Magalhães had this to say: If there is any city in the world today where the architect has an exciting role to play, that city must be Brasília. Half the city still remains to be built.

– When I myself visited Brasília many years ago, I had the feeling of being in a place that was completely uninhabited.

– The city now has a fairly heterogeneous community, not only because the population has steadily increased but also because the inhabitants come from every region of Brazil, especially from the North-east.

– My first impression all those years ago – I continued – when Brasília had just been founded, was of some remote location in one of those Westerns with saloon bars and shoot-outs.

– I daresay Brasília was like that in the early days.

– Gisela, which projects have you been involved with in Brasília?

– Amongst other things, a reception and assessment centre for needy and abandoned children.

– Let me put a question to both of you. What would you say are the aims and priorities of people who have settled in Brasília?

– The majority of people living in Brasília show a great deal of pluck and initiative. Regardless of status or class, people who have settled there feel they have a right to criticize and be heard whenever problems arise.

– There is already something of the same urban mentality in Brasília as you find in Rio de Janeiro, added Paulo.

– And what about the so-called satellite cities?

– These are cities which have largely been created by immigrant workers from various regions throughout Brazil.

– For a time, said Gisela, I myself worked in a satellite-city. Such projects offer a real challenge: the only work that counts there is building. In Brasília the Ministry of Education is trying to develop recent experiments aimed at ensuring a good general

education for everyone. But inevitably there are two different standards: the satellite-cities lack the necessary resources.

– Paulo, what effect did Brasília have on your own work?

– After I began working there, especially during the planning stages for the satellite-city of Planaltina, I came to understand more clearly and with greater objectivity the architect's role in contemporary society, especially in a developing nation such as ours.

– And how did life in Brasília affect both of you as human beings?

– One is constantly changing – replied Gisela – wherever one lives. Yet that landscape, that horizon of 360 degrees, somehow transforms one: you are alone but at the same time feel less alone because you have the impression of seeing more. Almost as if you were learning to look at things more closely.

– The amount of space in Brasília certainly gave me a much broader sense of perspective, said Paulo.

– What one misses is the sea... – commented Gisela.

– Brasília gave me the opportunity of leading a quieter life, which meant I could be more productive. I find I no longer think only about myself. These days I am more concerned about politics and society. I have become more mature.

The Magalhães have five children. I was interested in knowing how well they adapted to life in Brasília.

– Our children adored the place – Gisela told me – And like us, they enjoyed the different atmosphere.

Paulo explained:

– These children live in closer contact with their parents. The way in which the urban centre was planned has transformed it into one large *playground*. The city has been so carefully designed, so well spaced out, that any fears people had of finishing up with *something artificial* were soon dispelled.

ASHAMED OF LIVING

Some people are ashamed of living: they are timid, and I count myself among them. I feel I ought to apologize for taking up space: apologize for being me. I want to be alone! cries out the timid soul which only finds release in solitude. Ironically, the timid soul seeks the comforting warmth of other human beings. 'Carlos, go on! Be *gauche* in life.'* (I am not sure whether I am quoting Drummond correctly for I am writing this from memory.)

And when it comes to asking for an increase in salary – such torture! How does one begin? Does one present oneself with the false confidence of someone who knows their own worth – or present oneself as one really is, gauche and too modest by far?

So what should one do? Well, as it happens, the timid can sometimes show the greatest daring. They suddenly demand an increase in salary in tones of outrage and refuse to take no for an answer. But in the next breath they become alarmed at their own daring, begin to waver, decide any such increase is unwarranted, and feel distinctly unhappy.

I have always been a courageous coward. I can remember a vacation I once spent on a large ranch many years ago. The journey had to be made by train to a little railway station, which was quite isolated. From there I telephoned the ranch, which was some distance away and could only be reached by a hazardous dirt-track, narrow and winding with deep precipices on one side. My hosts asked me if they should provide a car or a horse. I opted immediately for a horse although I had no experience whatsoever of riding.

It was all very traumatic. A storm had broken out bringing heavy rain and suddenly it was dusk. Mounted on my fine horse, I could see nothing ahead of me. Flashes of lightning lit up those terrifying ravines below. The horse kept stumbling on the slippery track. And drenched to the skin, I almost died of fright. I knew I was putting my life at risk. When I finally arrived at the ranch, I did not have the strength to dismount. I practically fell

* Vai Carlos! [vai] ser *gauche* na vida. 'Poema de Sete Faces' [Seven-Sided Poem]. The opening poem in Carlos Drummond de Andrade's first book of poetry *Alguma Poesia* [Some Poetry] published in 1930.

into the rancher's arms.

This wonderful ranch was used as a guest-house and was well equipped with livestock. But I was to suffer the agonies of hell there. Three whole days passed before I could bring myself to speak to any of the other guests. And meal-times were particularly trying. I felt embarrassed and miserable at having to eat in the presence of complete strangers, no matter how hungry I felt.

There was a Japanese guest at the ranch who asked me if I knew how to play chess. I daringly suggested that he might like to teach me. Boasting that I was a quick learner, I assured him I would soon master the rules. So there I was, trying to cope with the intricacies of chess and embarrassed at my inability to understand the finer points of the game. But I soon learned the basic rules and managed to play in an amateurish way until, by sheer chance, I put in checkmate and from then on my Japanese opponent no longer wished to play with me. I felt so wretched and thought he would never forgive me or speak to me again. His very presence began to inhibit me. So you can imagine my surprise when I heard him whisper as he was leaving the ranch, with that delicacy and discretion so peculiar to the Orient: 'I am grateful to the parents who gave you birth.' Thank heavens he spared me the embarrassment of saying any such words to my face.

Before my thirteenth birthday, we moved from Recife to Rio aboard a British liner. In those days I did not know any English. But I boldly chose dishes with complicated names from the menu. And to my horror I soon found myself obliged to eat the most disgusting food. I was being punished for my temerity.

And even as a little girl in Recife, my shyness did not prevent me from going down on to the street and asking the first street urchin I met if he would play with me. No wonder other children sometimes shunned me when I was a little girl.

At the age of seven I would send story after story to the editor of the Children's Page which appeared every Thursday in the local newspaper. My stories were never published. But I refused to give up writing.

At the age of nine, I wrote a play in three acts which ran to four pages in my note-book. And since the play was about love even at that precocious age, I hid my note-book behind a book-shelf, and sometime later I foolishly destroyed it rather than have someone discover it and betray my secret. I say foolishly, because I am curious to know what I thought about love as a precocious nine-year-old.

THE SLOTH

They asked the sloth.
– Sloth, would you like some porridge?
The sloth replied slowly:
– Yeeeees, pleeeeease.
– Well, come and get some.
– Nooooo, thaaaaanks...I've change my miiiiind...

A rainy day makes one feel so lazy. When it rains I can never settle down to write. I am on my way to spend the weekend in Nova Friburgo. It is raining and near the main bus station I come across some sloths. It is more than I can bear and almost sends me to sleep. I stare at those soggy sloths, motionless, and dying of sloth. They give off a nice animal smell. The colour of stone, one could almost say they have no colour.

Nova Friburgo is quite a place. And the farm where we are staying has everything: horses, chickens, jaboticaba trees, daisies, banana plants, lemons, roses. It has an open-air oven for baking bread. In other words, a real farm. And Nova Friburgo itself has an aristocratic air. I go to the main bus-station where I find a copy of the *Jornal do Brasil* [The Brazilian Times] with an article by Drummond de Andrade. I lunch on *steak au poivre*. Only instead of being served beef, my steak is pork. This is on a Saturday which is my own special day in the week. Last night I had such a vivid dream that I got up, dressed, and put on some make-up. When I realized it was all a dream, I went back to bed but not before eating something, for I suddenly felt famished. In my dream, I had become a man. I was on my way to meet someone and was anxious not to be late. I must not say any more. The details are much too personal.

On the farm I inspect the cattle and poultry. This morning I had bacon and eggs for breakfast. Nova Friburgo is delightful. The houses are painted pink and blue. Nature seems so peaceful when it rains! I can still see those sloths rooted to the same spot and soaking wet. Never stirring. The same could be said of me. This is my day for sloth. But I do not want to sleep: I want to take advantage of being on a farm with lots of animals. Time seems to have stopped still in Nova Friburgo. How I wish that

oven were still in good working order and I could watch bread being baked. I see a coffee tree and this is enough to make me feel like drinking coffee. Scanning the pages of the *Jornal do Brasil*, I have come to the conclusion that the world is MAD. I missed the Charity Fair in Rio because of this trip to Nova Friburgo. I forgot to mention that there is a dog on the farm. A cross between a greyhound and a mongrel: a really friendly and playful dog. I must have another cup of coffee. I won't be long.

I am back again. My transistor radio is tuned in to Mozart. Such a light-hearted piece of music. On the farm I have also seen a white horse which is completely naked. The rain has stopped. Time to get down to some work. But I have nothing to say. What am I going to say, for heaven's sake? I shall say I picked a daisy and put it in the buttonhole of my black leather jacket where it looked so pretty. I must take another look at the sloths and inhale their damp odour. It is October, a neutral month. September, like May, is a happy month. The horse only comes back to sleep, and me too. I have decided to have a rest after lunch. A siesta does one good. I shall lunch at midday and read *Portnoy's Complaint* while I am eating. A truly courageous book. I fall asleep halfway through it.

After my siesta I shall go back into town. I should like to visit the Faculty of Letters. But it seems unlikely. I have a special affection for this Faculty and for Marly de Oliveira: a great poet and one of the most cultured women I know. I want to go into town but I feel drowsy. I must drink some Coca-Cola to wake me up. It was João Henrique who taught me that Coca-Cola with coffee helps to keep you awake. He assured me that long-distance lorry drivers drink this concoction. João Henrique taught me many things. I am eternally grateful to him. I now seem to remember that Míriam Bloch told me the same thing.

I finally went into town. Crowds had gathered on the streets. I inquired what was happening. They told me the police were looking for a rapist who had stabbed six women before escaping into the bush. I was horrified. I am afraid of dying. Death is so awful.

For some strange reason I found myself heading for the Faculty of Letters. I was not interested in visiting the library. I am not cultured. The nun in charge was unable to give me any information. There was a lecture that evening on the History of Art. I felt no inclination to attend. I have heard quite enough about art even though I am something of an artist myself. It makes me

feel almost ashamed to be a writer. Such a meaningless word. And it gives the impression of something much more intellectual than intuitive.

It is beautiful when the sun goes down in Nova Friburgo. I can also hear loud singing coming from the general store where they sell alcohol, which keeps the men cheerful. Here everything is cheerful, except for those attacks on women. I wonder if the police have caught the rapist yet? Let us hope so.

Nature is so indolent. The horses go on grazing. Now they are neighing. I can also hear crickets. Someone is playing the flute. Music by Bach or perhaps Vivaldi. It is four o'clock in the morning and all is silent. Only now can I hear the toads croaking. I have already drunk my coffee. Now I am smoking a cigarette. There are no pictures on the walls in this house. Unlike the place where I stayed in Cabo Frio which had some excellent paintings by Scliar, João Henrique and José de Dome. Scliar has a weakness for ochre. João Henrique likes green while José de Dome prefers a paler yellow. But there is a very attractive soup tureen on the dresser. What I miss most of all is my typewriter. I have two at home: an Olivetti and an Olympia. I prefer the Olivetti which is stronger and can withstand the constant pressure of tapping fingers. Everyone is asleep. Everyone, that is, except me. There is a horseshoe hanging on the wall to bring good fortune. The little birds outside are chirping with hunger. Everything here seems too good to be true. I am reading a thriller by Simenon. I adore his books. They read much better in French than in any translation. Let me give you a brief quotation: 'Falling across the room, a broad beam of light revealed fine particles of dust. It was as if that light were suddenly exposing the intimate life of the atmosphere.' Don't you find that splendid?

TWO LITTLE BOYS

– Let's play at something else now. I want to see if you're clever. Is this painting concrete or abstract?

– Abstract.

– No, you idiot. It's concrete. I painted it myself and put my own feelings into it and those feelings are concrete.

– Fair enough, but not all your feelings are concrete.

– Yes, they are.

– No, they're not. They're not all concrete, because your fear is not concrete. Only a small part of you is concrete.

– I'm a genius and I believe that everything is concrete.

– Oh, I had no idea that you were a famous painter.

– Well, I am. My name is Bergman, Maurice Bergman.* I am Swedish, and I'm a genius. You can tell by my face. Take a good look: I'm suffering! Now let me see if you understand anything about painting. Is that painting concrete?

– Of course, you can see at once that it's a map, just by the lines.

– Ah, is that so? And what about that one?

– Abstract.

– Wrong! That picture, too, would have to be concrete because it has lines as well.

– I'll explain to you what concrete means, it means...

– ...you're quite wrong.

– Why?

– Because I don't understand. When I don't understand what you're talking about, you must be wrong. And now I want to know: what is *comprete*?

– You mean concrete.

– No, I mean *comprete*. Because I'm a genius and every genius has to come up with at least one invention. I have invented the word *comprete*. Is music *comprete*?

– I believe it is, because one listens, and hears the music simply by listening.

* Presumably a reference to the Swedish film-producer Ingmar Bergman. The child is either getting the name wrong or humorously inventing another Christian name.

– Ah, but you can't draw!

– Do you think the ceiling is concrete?

– Of course!

– But if I were to change over that wall and put it where the ceiling is, it would become a wall-ceiling. Would that wall-ceiling then become concrete?

– It might. Is a ghost concrete?

– What do you mean by a ghost? Something with a sheet over its head?

– No, a real ghost.

– Well... Well, I suppose that would be concrete.

– Is Mummy concrete or abstract?

– Concrete, of course, you idiot.

In the adjoining room, their mother interrupted her sewing, her hands resting on her lap, her head bowed over a concrete heart which could be heard beating.

ROMANCE

It could be more appealing if I were to make it so. By explaining, for example, certain things which have enhanced some life, some thing, romance or character. It is perfectly *permissible* to make something attractive, at the risk of a picture becoming more of a picture once it has been framed. Naturally when it comes to reading I prefer something which appeals. It demands less effort, attracts, confines and encompasses me. In order to write, however, I find I have to detach myself. The experience can be rewarding, if only for those who know what it means to be a writer.

WRITING

One does not *make* a sentence. A sentence is born.

ENJOYING ONE'S WORK

'I get impatient with people who are forever complaining that their work is so tedious. If they find their work all that tedious, they would be better employed doing something else. The satisfaction we derive from our work ought to be a clear indication that we have made the right choice.'

TIME ON ONE'S HANDS

I myself am surprised when I see how many hours I have wasted during the year. It is clear that I have more time on my hands than I imagine and consequently more hours to devote to life. That is, if we count up the hours in the day, the week, the month, the year. It was someone in England, whose name I have forgotten, who arrived at this conclusion.

There are three hundred and sixty-five days, or eight thousand seven hundred and sixty hours, in the year. I am not joking; there are no fewer than eight thousand seven hundred and sixty hours.

Deduct eight hours daily for sleep. Now deduct five working days per week and eight hours for each of those days during forty-nine weeks (discounting, let us say, a minimum of two weeks for one's annual vacation, and another seven days for public holidays). Deduct another two hours daily for travelling to and from work if you live some distance from your place of work.

On this basis there are still one thousand nine hundred and thirty hours left each year. One thousand nine hundred and thirty hours in which to do whatever one pleases. Life is longer than we make it out to be. And every second counts.

I have just found an old sheet of paper with some phrases written in English. As usual, I forgot to make a note of the author's name. In translation they read as follows:

'Adults cannot lead your life for you. You must draw up your own time-table and make a clear distinction between activities which are worthwhile and those which are mere pastimes. You must try to understand that it is often just as important to break a good habit as to break a bad one. For all habits are suspect.'

BUYING A PIG IN A POKE

– Have you ever mistaken cat for sucking pig? I was once asked in a moment of distraction.

I replied:

– I'm forever mistaking cat for sucking-pig. Out of foolishness, distraction, ignorance. And sometimes even out of courtesy. People offer me cat and I thank them for the sucking-pig and when the cat starts miaowing, I pretend not to hear. Because I know the deception was intended to please me. But I am not quite so forgiving when I know the offer was made in bad faith.

The variations on this theme could fill an encyclopaedia. Such as, for example, when the cat imagines itself to be a sucking-pig. And because one is dealing with a cat which is obviously unhappy with its condition, then I indulge its fantasy. After all, a cat has every right to want to be a sucking-pig.

And there are even instances where the cat genuinely wants to be a cat but *cochon de lait oblige*, and then things really do get difficult.

Some people even refuse to admit that they enjoy eating cat meat and try to persuade us they are eating sucking-pig. And we keep up the pretence just to keep them happy.

In a treatise on the subject, an expert on melancholia would claim to have passed off many an alley cat as sucking-pig. An expert in irascibility would say something unprintable.

I feel really ashamed when I refuse sucking-pig because I suspect it might be cat. (There is a proverb which says: Better to be cheated by a friend than to mistrust him.) This is the price of mistrust.

But truly, when I mistake a cat for a sucking-pig, the one who comes off worst is the person who offered it to me. The only mistake on my part was to have been gullible.

I am enjoying writing this. A number of sucking-pigs have been miaowing on the nearby roof-tops and now I have had my chance to miaow back. For cats, too, can be rabid.

WHAT IS ANGUISH?

A teenager asked me this difficult question. Much depends on the person suffering from anguish. Some people use this word freely, as if anguish somehow improved their status: that in itself is yet another form of anguish.

Anguish can also be having no hope in hope. Or conforming without resignation. Or refusing to confess even to oneself. Or never being oneself, should one ever know oneself. Anguish can be the misery of being alive. It can also be not having the courage to suffer anguish – and escape is yet another form of anguish. But anguish is part of life: all that lives, simply by being alive tends to recoil.

This same teenager asked me: Don't you find there is a frightening emptiness in everything? Yes, there is. Meanwhile one waits for the heart to understand.

LAVOISIER EXPRESSED IT MORE CLEARLY

The ephemeral nature of things and beings. But once the ephemeral nature of living things has been replaced by other ephemeral things which are in their turn replaced by yet more ephemeral things, this constant process might be defined eternal. An eternity which is within our reach. But Lavoisier expressed it more clearly.

THE OBEDIENT (I)

What follows is straightforward, something to be related and forgotten.

But I have been imprudent enough to pause for a moment longer than I should have done and now find myself compromised. From the moment that I, too, put myself at risk – for I have identified myself with the couple I am about to speak of – from that moment it is no longer simply a fact to be related and for this reason words begin to fail me. By now I feel at quite a loss. The fact ceases to be a simple fact and its widening repercussions have become much more important.

Those repercussions have been delayed and suppressed far too long and it was almost inevitable they should eventually explode.

And now they have finally exploded on this Sunday afternoon, when there has been no rain for weeks and the dessicated beauty of flowers and fruits persists, arid and shining and empty. In the presence of this disquieting beauty I become solemn, as if standing before a tomb. But what has happened to the initial fact? It has merged with this aggressive Sunday. Unable to cope with this afternoon, I hesitate before also becoming aggressive or retreating slightly wounded. The initial fact is suspended in the sun-drenched dust of this scorching Sunday filled with solitude. Until, finally summoned to the telephone, I go rushing off gratefully to lick the hand of this person who loves me and frees me.

Chronologically, the situation was as follows: a man and a woman had been married for twenty-five years without any children.

The moment I discovered this I was intrigued. I was obliged to think, however irksome. And even if I were to say nothing more and end the story with this discovery, I should have already compromised myself with my most impenetrable thoughts. As if I had seen a pen-drawing against a white background, a man and a woman tied to each other. And my eyes are glued to this white background and find much to observe there, for every word has its shadow.

This man and this woman, who were extremely taciturn and had a mute, impassive expression, began – perhaps driven by that urge even experienced by people who look as if they are half-dead – began trying to live with greater intensity. In search of what? That destiny which precedes us? And to which we are fatally driven? But what destiny?

This attempt to live with greater intensity led them to weigh up what was or was not important. They did this in their own way: with a lack of know-how and experience and modesty. They were feeling their way about. Now that they had discovered this vice much too late in life, they tried independently to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential, not that they would ever have used the word *essential*, nor did they try to understand what was happening to them because such things had no meaning in their social milieu. It was as if they wanted to discover what was essential in order to live their lives accordingly. But nothing came of the vague, almost self-conscious effort they were making: the very plot of life forever escaped them. And it was only by summing up the day's events that they could get any feeling of having lived, of somehow having lived despite themselves. But by then it was already night and they were putting on their slippers.

None of this really created a situation for the couple. That is to say, something that each of them might recount to themselves as they turned their backs on each other in bed, their eyes momentarily open and almost startled before they finally fell asleep. People so badly need to be able to tell themselves their own story. But they had nothing to tell. With a sigh of false comfort, they closed their eyes and fell into a troubled sleep. And when they weighed up their lives, they could not even include this attempt to live with greater intensity, or discount it as when dealing with one's income tax. A weighing-up which they gradually began to engage in more and more frequently, without even the technical equipment of a terminology to match their thoughts. If this represented a situation, it was not exactly a situation with which one could ostensibly live.

But it did not simply happen like this. They were able to keep calm because 'not to lead', 'not to invent', 'not to err', was for them really much more than just a habit, it was a question of honour to which they were tacitly pledged. It would never have occurred to them to break that pledge. And offend God. Offend society? What society? Which God did they serve?

Their proud conviction stemmed from a noble awareness that they were two individual human beings amongst thousands like themselves. 'To be an equal' was the role they had been given, the task with which they had been entrusted. Both of them had been singled out for their respect for obedience and they solemnly responded with civic gratitude to the confidence that their equals had placed in them. They belonged to a caste. The role they fulfilled with pride and decorum was that of anonymous persons, of children of God, of members of a community.

Yet, perhaps because of the relentless passage of time, all this had started to become dull, dull, dull. Sometimes claustrophobic. (The man as well as the woman had already reached the critical age.) They would open the windows and comment that it was extremely hot. Without exactly living a life of boredom, it was as if no one ever sent them any news. Besides, boredom was part of this obedience to a life of honest sentiments.

THE OBEDIENT (II)

But since all of this was beyond their understanding, and they found so many things above their heads which, even if expressed in words, they would have failed to understand, all this began to look like irremediable life. A life to which they submitted in silence and with that somewhat wounded expression which is common amongst men of good will. It resembled that irremediable life for which God destined us. Or did He? Doubts began to creep in.

Life irremediable, but not concrete. In fact, it was an unattainable life of dreams. Sometimes, when they were speaking about someone who was eccentric, they would say, with the condescension one class shows towards another: 'Ah, he takes life seriously, he leads the life of a poet.' One could say, judging from the few words I heard the couple say, that they both led, leaving aside any extravagance, the life of a second-rate poet: a life which consisted only of dreams.

No, no, that is not true. It was not a life of dreams, for that would never have enriched them. But one of unreality. Although there were moments when suddenly, for one reason or another, they would plunge into reality. And then they had the impression of touching depths no one could hope to transcend.

As, for example, when the husband came back earlier than usual to find his wife was not at home. The husband felt as if a chain had been broken. Feeling put out, he sat down to read the newspaper in a silence so hushed that even a corpse at his side would have broken the spell. He sat there, pretending in all honesty to be completely wrapped up in his newspaper, his senses on the alert. This was the moment when he touched the bottom with startled feet. He could not remain for long like this without the risk of drowning, for touching the bottom was the same as having water above one's head. These were the more concrete thoughts in his subconscious. Which caused him, level-headed and sensible as he was, to extricate himself at once. He extricated himself at once, yet somehow reluctantly, for his wife's absence held out such a promise of forbidden pleasure that he experienced what might be called disobedience. He extricated

himself reluctantly but without discussion, conforming to what was expected of him. Who expected it of him? He could not be sure. He was no deserter, capable of betraying the trust of others. But if this were reality, there was no way he could live with it.

As for his wife, she touched on reality rather more frequently, for she had more leisure and fewer worries to contend with, such as colleagues at work, overcrowded buses, and all those administrative chores. She would sit down to do some mending, and little by little would find herself confronting reality. The mere act of sitting down to do some mending was intolerable while it lasted. The sudden way the dot falls neatly on the *i*, that sensation of being so much a part of existence, and everything being so clearly itself, was unbearable. But when the feeling passed, it was as if the wife had drunk from some possible future. Little by little, this woman's future started to become something which she brought into the present, something contemplative and secret.

It was surprising how the two of them remained indifferent, for example, to politics, to the change of government, to developments in general, although, like everyone else, they too discussed these things from time to time. Truly, they were so reserved these two that, were anyone to tell them so to their face, they would have been surprised and flattered. It would never have occurred to them to think of themselves as being reserved. Perhaps they would have understood if someone had said to them: 'You two are the very symbol of military and patriotic reserve.' Some acquaintances said of them after the event: they were decent people. And there was nothing more to be said, for they were decent people.

There was nothing more to be said. They lacked the burden of any grave error, which is often precisely what one needs to open a safety exit. They had once taken something very seriously. They were obedient.

Not simply out of craven submission, but as in a sonnet. It was obedience out of their love for symmetry. For them, symmetry was the only possible art.

Strange that each of them should have reached the same conclusion that, alone, the one could live longer than the other. It would be a long road of rehabilitation and of useless effort, because from different angles many had reached the same conclusion.

The wife, under the continuous spell of fantasy, not only

arrived at this bold conclusion, but found her life transformed into something broader and more disturbing, into something richer and even superstitious. Each thing became the cipher of something else, everything was symbolic and even vaguely spiritualistic, within the limits permitted by Roman Catholicism. Not only did she come to this rash conclusion but – provoked solely by the fact that she was a woman – she began to think some other man would save her. The idea was not all that absurd. She knew it was not. To be half-right confused her and plunged her into meditation.

Her husband, influenced by the anguished masculinity of his new environment, and by his own waning masculinity, which was timid but real, started to believe that endless love affairs would bring new life.

Dreamers, they began practising tolerance: it was heroic to be tolerant. They silenced any suspicions, disagreeing about the most convenient hour to dine and arguing freely, the one making a sacrifice for the other, because love is sacrifice. What love?

Until the day arrived when the woman was finally roused from her dream when she bit into an apple and felt one of her front teeth breaking. With the apple still in her hand, she examined herself closely in the bathroom mirror – and thus losing all perspective – she saw the pale face of a middle-aged woman with a broken tooth which made her look pathetic, and her own dark, mysterious eyes... At rock-bottom and the water already up to her neck, in her fifties, and with no message to leave behind. Instead of going to the dentist, she threw herself from her apartment window, a person for whom one could feel so grateful, so deeply grateful, because she was the pillar of our disobedience.

As for her husband, once the river-bed was dry and without any water in which he might drown, he walked over the bottom without looking at the ground, as nimbly as if he were using a cane. The river-bed had suddenly become dry. Bewildered, he walked over the river-bed with the false confidence of someone who is about to fall flat on his face at any moment.

'FORGIVE ME. I AM NOT PROFOUND'

Érico Veríssimo is one of the most likeable men I have ever known: he is such a warm and generous human being. I first met Érico and his wife Mafalda in Washington. He was working for the OEA. I found a safe retreat in their friendship and hospitality. Érico used to say that his happiest memories of Washington were of the hours he spent at my house. The stifling bureaucracy surrounding his life in Washington meant that Érico could not write a single line during the three years he spent there.

He does not think of himself as being an important or innovative writer, nor does he consider himself all that intelligent. Érico simply sees himself as someone with certain talents which he uses to the full. But these have been largely ignored by the literary establishment, who rank him as a run-of-the-mill *raconteur*. The books which brought him fame, such as *Olhai os lírios do campo* [Behold the Lilies of the Field], he now considers mediocre. He was to write better things after this initial phase, but critics have shown themselves reluctant to revise the opinions expressed by their predecessors. In recent years, several critics here in Brazil have taken his books more seriously, especially after the appearance of *O tempo e o vento* [Time and the Wind] in 1951. But he prefers being liked, or better still, being loved, rather than being simply admired. Readers who enjoy his work are more important to him than glowing reviews. He has also fallen foul of certain 'factions'. Left-wing critics denounce him as being too 'complacent', critics on the Right accuse him of being a Communist. His favourite character-creation is Capitão Rodrigo. Closely followed by Floriano, whom he sees as his own spiritual counterpart. As for his women characters, he regards Bibiana and Maria Valéria in *O Tempo e o Vento* as being the most important. When critics insist that his fiction is lacking in depth, he quotes the words of a French writer who said *'un pot de chambre est aussi profond'* [a chamber-pot also has depth]. But he is inclined to agree with his critics: 'Forgive me, I am not profound.'

His writing began at school where he wrote interesting little essays. And he was working behind the counter of a pharmacy

in Cruz Alta when he wrote his first short story. At that time he still hoped to become a painter.

Érico is hopeless when it comes to business. He hates discussing contracts, and always comes out the loser.

In Brazil, he is immensely popular. Tourists are always being shown the house where Érico and Mafalda Veríssimo live. What he enjoys most about this popularity is the feeling that he is communicating with others. And the memorable characters in his books have not only brought him fame but have turned him into something of a myth. He gets annoyed at the idea of his house being exploited as a tourist attraction, but tries to be patient. Besides, he does not like to disappoint people who turn up unannounced in the hope of meeting their idol in the flesh. He keeps open house, and some evenings the couple receive anything from ten to twenty unexpected guests. Students come in droves to ask him questions, some still at primary school, others already studying at university. He is also consulted by people with personal problems. He listens, meditates and offers kindly advice. Sometimes he can actually solve the problem and nothing makes him happier.

His writing has given him much satisfaction. In private life, he enjoys his children and grandchildren.

He has never been able to fathom where inspiration, for want of a better word, comes from. This is something which often occupies his mind.

It is a well-known fact that Érico has no desire to become a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. He respects the Academy and has many good friends amongst its members. But he has never felt any ambition to be part of that illustrious institution: he believes this to be a question of temperament.

Érico draws up a careful plan before embarking on a book, but once he has mapped out the main structure he feels free to improvise as he goes along. He believes novels to be the product of the subconscious mind and much prefers to think of himself as a craftsman, which probably explains why critics find his fiction lacking in depth.

He has travelled half the world with Mafalda. She has been an important influence. He values her ability to understand him, assist him, accompany him and, on occasion, guide him without his even noticing. Érico suggests he may have inherited this passion for travel from his grandfather, who was a cattle-drover. He is always eager to investigate what lies yonder. Mafalda has

a tranquil spirit in the best sense of the word; she prefers to be settled and can throw down roots at once. But, ever restless, Érico insists on dragging her on to trains, buses and aeroplanes and off they go. He has felt most at home in the Latin countries of Europe: France, Italy, Spain, Portugal. He adores the Mediterranean. Greece and Israel also made a lasting impression.

Érico hopes to go back to writing for children. He is appalled at the widespread influence of *Superman* and *Batman*. But he cannot help wondering what would appeal to children in these mad times. He deplores the poverty of good literature for children in Brazil.

What does he love most of all in this world? First of all, other people. His people. His own clan. His friends. Next come music, books, pictures, travel. And he has to admit that he even likes himself in his own modest way.

1973

BERNE CATHEDRAL

Every Sunday evening (I believe every Saturday evening as well) they would light what seemed like thousands of lamps tracing the outlines of the Cathedral: gothic, solid, and pure. Seen from a distance, this gave the impression that the rough masonry had been transformed into a luminous drawing created with light. The light dematerialized the Cathedral's solid structure. And hard as I tried not to lose sight of those solid walls, I felt I was passing through them. Only to discover that I was not touching the other side of transparency, but my own transparency. Like the transparency one associates with Christmas Eve.

WHAT LOVE CAN LEAD TO

– (I love you)
– (Is that what I am then?)
– (You are the love which I have for you)
– (I feel that I am about to see myself...I can almost see...I am almost there)
– (I love you)
– (Ah, that's better. Now I can see myself. So this is me. Portrayed in full.)

ENLISTMENT

The footsteps are growing louder. They are getting nearer. Now they sound quite close. Closer still. Really close. Still approaching. Now they are not simply close, they are inside me. Will they overtake me and carry on? I hope so. It would mean my salvation. I am no longer sure with which sense I measure distance. For those footsteps are no longer simply close and heavy. They are no longer simply inside me. I am marching with them. I have enlisted.

SUBMISSION TO THE PROCESS

The process of living consists of errors – most of them essential – of courage and indolence, the despair and hope of inert awareness, of constant feeling (not thought) which leads nowhere, leads absolutely nowhere, and suddenly what you thought was *nothingness* turns out to be your own terrifying contact with the fabric of life. And that moment of recognition (akin to revelation) must be accepted with the greatest innocence, with the same innocence with which one is born. The process is difficult? But that is like saying that the extremely capricious and natural manner in which a flower is made is difficult. (Mummy, said the little boy, the sea is beautiful, green and blue, and with waves! It's all naturalized! Nobody made it!) The nagging impatience (standing beside a plant to watch it grow yet without seeing anything) is not in relation to the thing itself, but to this monstrous patience (the plant grows at night). As if one were to say: 'I cannot bear to be patient for another second', 'the patience of the watchmaker puts my nerves on edge', etc.: it is an impatient patience. But the greatest burden of all is torpid patience: an ox pulling the plough.

FRIENDLY DISAGREEMENT

I have been friendly with Carlinhos, or rather, with José Carlos Oliveira for many years. We often used to watch football matches together on television when my sons were little. Here is one of our many conversations. This conversation is *replete* (such a pretentious adjective) *replete* with certain words no journalist is free to publish. Meanwhile, readers may feel free to fill in the gaps with any swear-words they consider appropriate.

– Who are you, Carlinhos? And who, for heaven's sake, am I?

– I believe you're Clarice. But I'm not sure who I am. And the world is completely (swear-word) and at a standstill. But this needn't concern either you or me.

– It's all very well for you to say that because you have no children. I'm not simply referring to my own two boys but to children in general.

– The children of mankind constitute our humanity. And for something like four million years they have been getting sent to their death. That's their problem, in so far as I can do nothing about it. So everything's violence and injustice? Well, to quote a popular expression among children: Tough luck.

– Carlinhos, we both write yet neither of us deliberately set out to be a writer. But now that we've got landed with this profession, I feel remorse because every word we utter should somehow be like bread for eating.

– That's absurd. For example, if I say (swear-word), no one will publish it. We are condemned to preserving a language which is simply a collection of words. We are a couple of idiots – you and I. The rest is literature. Now let me ask you:

1) Clarice, why do you write?

2) Clarice, why do you not write?

– I write because I cannot remain silent: I do not write because I am profoundly taciturn and indecisive.

– Now you're being *whimsical*!

– I'm being quite serious. You're the one who is being elusive by refusing to give me a straight answer.

– If you're being serious then that's because you think there's something to be gained from speaking in earnest. Well, I don't

agree. Those people who do not understand life think life consists of happenings. Those same people adore Van Gogh because he cut off his ear; Toulouse-Lautrec because he was a dwarf; Modigliani because he suffered from tuberculosis; Rembrandt because he died of hunger; James Dean because he died in a car crash; Marilyn Monroe because she committed suicide. They believe in posterity because they think they are posterity. Well then, I say stuff (swear-word) posterity.

– I'm afraid we're not on the same wave-length. Writing is not a happening. You're beginning to sound like the person who wrote that literature is 'the smile of society'. What I'm speaking about is unintentionally cutting life in two and drawing blood. We are fond of each other, Carlinhos, but we are speaking a different language.

– We're certainly speaking a different language. For I prefer to be happy on the street rather than cut life in two.

– And I prefer to have everything. Can't you understand? I don't want to lose anything or be forced to make a choice.

– You also prefer to be a great writer. But I gave up any such ambition a long time ago. Nowadays I prefer to eat and drink, to make love and die. I don't feel I have any responsibility to literature.

– Nor I, Carlinhos! But I can see the two of us coming to blows over this, notwithstanding our friendship. And let me add that if living means drinking, I want something more out of life: I want more because my thirst for life is greater than yours.

– Evidently. Everything humiliates us. No one believes in us. They're satisfied with any old rubbish. They ask no more of us. The rest is nothing but empty words.

– A heated argument between friends is no cause for alarm. And beneath the bitterness and rebellion lies a generous heart.

The conversation turns to death.

– Vinícius de Morais and I – the poet gave me permission to quote him – Vinícius and I are anxious to be cremated. The poet, because he suffers from claustrophobia, and in my case because I consider it more hygienic. But since they cremate corpses only in São Paulo, we are both terrified of dying before we can catch a plane to get there.

Carlinhos then told me:

– I'm an existentialist, Clarice. I accept each moment as if it were my last. Consequently my life is one permanent drama. I am forever consulting my heart and then acting accordingly.

A SITUATION WORTHY OF NELSON RODRIGUES

That's right.

The man who wore a tie-pin was having an affair with the wife of the doctor who was treating his daughter. The whole town knew what was going on. And the doctor's wife would hang a white towel from the window whenever the coast was clear and a coloured towel when the doctor was at home.

But either I am getting things muddled or the story is so complicated that it would take a writer like Dalton Trevisan to unravel the plot. The real life episodes in Trevisan's short stories are pure invention. I must apologize to my readers because, besides narrating the facts, I also use my imagination and that is precisely what I do when writing my chronicles. I can sense reality. But this tale is not one of my inventions. It was invented by someone with greater power of imagination than me.

The man's daughter had gangrene in one leg and it had to be amputated. This bright-eyed Jandira, who was seventeen and more tempestuous than a young colt, was engaged to be married. No sooner did her fiancé see her on crutches than he broke off their engagement. He failed to see the pathos in her joy and affection and felt no remorse. He had no intention of marrying a cripple. Everyone, including the girl's mother, pleaded with him not to break the girl's heart. They explained he need only keep up any pretence for a short time because Jandira was not expected to live.

And within three months – as if she were honouring their promise not to be a burden to her heartless fiancé – the girl died. Pretty and with the most beautiful hair; inconsolable and still deeply in love with her fiancé, and as frightened of death as a child in the dark. Or perhaps not. Never having experienced death, I cannot be certain. And perhaps I shall never find out, not even after death, which may not be so dark after all.

Her fiancé, who was known by his surname Bastos, appears to have been living with another woman, even while Jandira was still alive. And he continued to live with this woman without caring what other people thought or said.

Until one day this woman flew into a jealous rage. And as

scrupulous as Nelson Rodrigues himself, she planned her cruel revenge. Now where was I? Let me start again with a new paragraph.

Until one day this woman flew into a jealous rage, and while Bastos was asleep she poured a kettle of boiling water into his ear, and he barely had time to let out the most awful roar before passing out; a roar the like of which had never been heard before. Bastos was removed to hospital where he hovered between life and death, the one in mortal combat with the other.

The jealous virago was sentenced to prison for eighteen months. And when she was finally released – guess who was waiting for her? Bastos, of course. By then, he was a very sick man and permanently deaf – Bastos, of all people, who could not bear to see physical defects in others.

So what happened? Reunited, they lived happily ever after.

Jandira, who died in her teens all those years ago, is mourned only by her mother. And if I have suddenly remembered her after all this time, it is out of affection.

And this is where her father comes into the story. He carried on having an affair with the wife of the doctor who had treated his daughter with such devotion. And everyone knew of their affair, including the doctor and Jandira's mother. (I may have lost the thread again, this story is so confusing.) But let me see.

Even after he discovered that Jandira's father was his wife's lover, the doctor went on treating this poor girl who was terrified of the dark. Her mother was well aware of her husband's infidelities as she watched him leave the house attired in an elegant green suit and pink striped shirt, and wearing his gold watch, diamond ring and gold tie-pin. Every inch the affluent businessman, he was widely respected in the community for, as everyone knows, the rich and successful command our respect. Isn't that so? How do I know? Simply by using my imagination. That's how I know.

And there is one detail I must not forget to mention. The lover had a gold tooth in front. And he reeked of garlic. His whole being reeked of garlic but his mistress appeared not to notice. She was only interested in having a lover, with or without the stench of garlic. How do I know? I just do.

What I do not know is what happened to these characters in the end. Did they finally separate? It all happened such a long time ago and some of them are probably dead by now.

There is one last detail which might help to explain the

accursed origin of this whole story. These events took place in Niterói, where the timbers on the quayside are always wet and dark and ferry-boats ply to and fro. Niterói is a mysterious place, full of old buildings with blackened walls. But could this business of the boiling water being poured into a man's ear really have happened there? I honestly don't know.

What am I to make of this story? I don't know that either: I am prepared to offer the story to anyone who wants it for suddenly I have lost interest. I am tired of this story. Sometimes I also get tired of people. Then it passes and once again I feel inquisitive and interested.

That's all for now.

LACK OF INSPIRATION

Friedrich Schiller in a letter sent from Weimar on 1 December 1788 and addressed to Körner, expresses an idea which I myself have intuitively grasped. But let us hear what Schiller had to say to Körner, who had been complaining of a lack of inspiration:

'It strikes me that the root of your problem lies in the constraint your intelligence is imposing on your imagination. Let me explain what I mean by using an allegory. The creative spirit is not helped but only hampered if one allows the intellect to scrutinize too closely those ideas which come flooding in. In isolation an idea may seem insignificant and remote yet become important in association with another idea or ideas, which seemed just as insignificant at the outset. The intellect cannot appraise all these ideas unless it retains them and has the opportunity of examining them in relation to other ideas. In a creative spirit, however, I always have the impression that the intellect has withdrawn its sentinels from the gates and ideas have come crowding in, and only then does the intellect inspect the multitude. And so, you worthy critics, or whatever you choose to call yourselves, feel embarrassed and intimidated by this moment of fleeting madness which is to be found in all creative spirits, and whose greater or lesser duration distinguishes the thinking artist from the dreamer. Hence your complaints about aridity; you are much too hasty in rejecting ideas and excessively severe in appraising them.'

THE GROUP

Recently I went to a luncheon party which was both happy and sad. I met two former colleagues there who once studied with me at the National Law Faculty. The atmosphere reminded me of the film *The Group*, based on Mary McCarthy's novel, except for certain confidences which we chose to avoid. Our reunion was a happy affair in so far as we are fond of each other. Besides, the food was delicious and we were hungry. Yet sad, because life had left its scars, and there we were, smiling and

resolute. Sad also, because not one of the three had practised law in the end. To be a lawyer, dear God. That is the last thing someone like me needs. The simplest document throws me into the most awful panic and confusion.

Sad because we had lost all those years studying for nothing. Study? Only one of us had taken her studies seriously, the daughter of a famous jurist. As for me, my decision to study law had been a great mistake. I chose the course without seeking any guidance. After reading a book about the Brazilian penal system, I thought that one day I might be able to reform our prisons. Unable to suppress his curiosity, San Tiago Dantas finally asked me one day why I had chosen to study Law. I told him I was interested in Penal Law. He retorted: 'Ah, I thought as much. Trust you to show an interest in the literary branch of Law. Anyone who is genuinely interested in the subject studies Civil Law.' How I miss San Tiago.

But coming back to the group: were we happy or sad as we said goodbye? Who knows? As I thought of those lost years, I felt a certain stoicism. For there had been many other wasted chapters in my life. Life is short: but if we cut away the dead wood, it will become even shorter. A life reduced to no more than several days? One should never forget that those lost years were lived at the time with such passion (even for Penal Law). And somehow this mitigates the pain.

I left at three to be greeted by the afternoon sun. The house where the luncheon was held was in Urca, a district I rarely frequent. This intensified the sense of being lost. Everything seemed so strange. And in my distress I momentarily saw myself as I am. Did I like what I saw? I simply accepted it. I hailed a taxi to take me home and reflected without bitterness: there are so many useless things in life which can help us, such as this taxi: things which can carry us from one useful point to another. And on this occasion, I did not feel like talking to the taxi-driver.

THE FIRST BOOK OF EACH OF MY LIVES

Someone once asked me which was the first book of my life. I prefer to speak of the first book of each of my lives. As I search my memory, I have the physical sensation of clutching that treasure in my hands: a slim little volume which included the story of 'The Ugly Duckling' and 'The Tale of Aladdin and his Magic Lamp'. As a child, I would read those stories over and over again. Children, unlike adults, do not have this foible of only reading books once: a child learns things almost by rote, and even when he has memorised it word for word, the child is capable of rereading the book with almost the same excitement experienced the first time. The story of the little duckling who was so ugly that he stood out amongst all the others who were pretty, but when he grew up the mystery was solved: he was not a duck but a beautiful swan. This story gave me much food for thought and I identified with the suffering of the ugly little duckling. Who knows, perhaps I, too, was a swan?

As for Aladdin, he sent my imagination into the realms of the impossible, I was so credulous. And at that age, I could still believe in the impossible. The idea of the Genie who said: 'Ask of me what you will for I am here to serve you', made me feel quite faint. Sitting quietly in my corner, I wondered if the Genie would say to me one day: 'Ask of me what you will'. But even as a child, I somehow realized that I am one of those people who must rely on their own resources in order to get what they want, if and when the opportunity arises.

I have lived a number of lives. In another of my lives, my sacred book was borrowed because I could not afford to buy it: Monteiro Lobato's *Reinações de Narizinho* [The Adventures of Little Snotty]. I have already written about the trials and tribulations I suffered before I could read this wonderful book. It belonged to another girl at school whose father ran a bookshop. The little girl, who was fat and freckled, had taken her revenge by being cruel when she discovered how badly I wanted to read that book. She started the cat-and-mouse game of 'Come back tomorrow and I'll lend it to you': And whenever I did go back, my heart practically thumping with joy, she would tell me: 'I

can't lend it to you today, come back tomorrow.' After almost a month of empty promises, proud as I was, I finally received it in all humility so that she would not deny me the book forever more. The mother of this first little monster to appear in my life noticed what was going on and, somewhat horrified at her own child's behaviour, ordered her to hand over the book at once. I did not read it at one go: I read it very slowly, savouring a few pages at a time rather than finish it too quickly. I am convinced that no other book has ever given me so much pleasure.

In another of my lives, I became a member of a public library. I tended to choose books at random and usually by their title. And one day I picked out *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Hesse. I found the title appealing and somehow reminiscent of an adventure story such as Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. With every reading, Hesse's novel continued to amaze me. This book contained more than one adventure. I had been writing short stories since my early teens but Hesse's influence opened up a new chapter of inspiration and I set about writing a long story in imitation of his style: this inner voyage was one of endless fascination. I had come into contact with great literature.

In yet another of my lives I was fifteen and earning money for the very first time. Feeling very pleased with myself, I went into a bookshop with money to spend and thought to myself that this was a world in which I could live quite happily. I leafed through most of the books displayed on the counters and read a few lines in each book before passing on to the next one. Until I opened a book which contained phrases so different from anything I had ever read before that I remained there, my eyes glued to the page. In my excitement I thought to myself: but this book *is me*! And struggling to control my emotions, I bought it. It was only later that I discovered that the author, far from being unknown, was considered to be one of the best writers of her age: none other than Katherine Mansfield.

CALLING THINGS BY THEIR REAL NAME

I copied this extract from Pound which I found quoted in a collection of essays edited by Norman Holmes Pearson:

– 'The betrayal of words begins', says Pound, 'by using words which do not get to the truth, words which fail to express what the author wanted them to say.'

Ezra Pound was fond of quoting the reply given by Confucius whenever anyone asked him what his first priority would be were he chosen to govern. The sage's reply was objective and direct: 'To call the people and all things by their real name.'

This, Pearson reminds us, is the first problem confronting any artist for, as Pound stated: 'ARTISTS are the antennae of the race' and 'The one thing you must never do is to assume that when something is wrong with the arts, artists are to blame. When a given hormone is missing, this makes the entire system deficient.' 'Beauty is difficult', Pound reiterates in his *Cantos*.

EXCERPT

He was completely defeated by the world in which he lived. And he had distanced himself from others in his frustration, convinced that others were also frustrated. He had no desire to be part of a world where, for example, the rich devoured the poor. Believing his attitude to be simply romantic, he felt that if he were to join forces with those who were struggling against this destruction of life, he might become trapped in his own individuality. And unless he took precautions, this might transform itself into an obsessive or purely contemplative solitude. So until something better turned up, he tried to relate to other frustrated human beings by means of a somewhat perverse love, which not only touched others but even himself in some curious way.

GOOD FRIENDS

We had not been mates for very long. It was only during our last year at school that we really got to know each other well. And from then on we became inseparable. For some time we had both felt the need of a friend in whom we could confide. Our friendship soon reached the point where we could keep nothing to ourselves: one of us would telephone the other immediately to arrange a meeting. After a good chat, we both felt much better. These constant exchanges became so intense that, whenever we had nothing to confide, we would anxiously try to invent some topic of conversation. But the theme had to be serious because idle chatter would be unworthy of this passionate sincerity we were both experiencing for the first time.

But the first signs of tension were beginning to appear. Sometimes one of us would telephone the other, we would meet and then have nothing to say to each other. We were very young and did not know how to keep silent. At first, when we could find no suitable topic of conversation, we would make comments about other people. But we were both aware that we were undermining the very core of our friendship. To try and talk about any emotional attachments was also unthinkable, for a fellow did not discuss his love affairs. We tried being silent, only to feel uneasy as soon as we separated.

Coming away from these encounters, my solitude seemed immense and arid. I reached the point of reading books just to be able to talk about them. But a deep friendship demanded the utmost sincerity. In my search for this perfection, I began to feel empty. Our meetings became ever more disappointing. My real inner poverty gradually became apparent. And I know that my friend had reached the same impasse.

About this time my family moved to São Paulo. My friend was living alone because his family lived in Piauí. So I invited him to move into our apartment where I had been left in charge. Such excitement! In a state of bliss we arranged our books and records and prepared the perfect ambience for friendship. But once everything was in order, we found ourselves twiddling our

thumbs and with nothing to say to each other. All we had was our friendship.

We were so anxious to save each other. For friendship is a question of salvation.

But we had already touched on all the problems, examined all the possibilities. All we possessed was this thing which we had so eagerly sought from the outset and found at long last: sincere friendship. This was the only way we knew – and knew with such bitterness – how to emerge from this solitude every soul endures within its body.

But how artificial we discovered our friendship to be. It was as if we were trying to concoct a lengthy speech to express a simple fact which could be said with one word. Our friendship was as insoluble as the sum of two numbers: it was useless trying to elaborate on the plain fact that two and three make five.

We organized some wild parties in the apartment but the neighbours complained and the parties were not a great success.

If only we could have found something we might do for each other. But there was never any opportunity, nor did we believe in giving proof of a friendship that needed no proof. The most we could hope to do, we were doing already: treating each other as sincere friends. But this was not enough to fill our days, especially during the holidays.

Our real troubles began during those long summer holidays.

The friend to whom I could offer nothing except my sincerity unknowingly began confronting me with my poverty. And the solitude we felt when we were together, listening to music or reading, was much more intense than when we found ourselves alone. Much greater and more frustrating. We could no longer find peace. When we withdrew to our separate rooms, we felt so relieved that we could not bring ourselves to look at each other.

It is true that there was a pause in these developments, a truce which gave us more hope than the circumstances warranted. This arose when my friend had some trouble with the police. It was nothing serious, but we behaved as if it were in order to exploit the situation. For by that time we had already got into the habit of doing favours for each other. I eagerly sought out one family contact after another in my effort to *muster support* for my friend. And when the time came to have documents signed and sealed, I attended to everything and obtained all the necessary signatures.

During this period we would spend our evenings at home, worn out but animated: we would report on the day's events and plan our next move. We did not probe very deeply into what was happening: it was sufficient that all this activity should have the seal of friendship. I felt I now understood why bride and groom pledge themselves to each other; why the husband insists upon providing for his wife while she solicitously prepares his meals; and why a mother fusses over her children. And it was during this same period that with some sacrifice I bought a tiny gold brooch for the woman who was to become my wife. It was only much later that I began to understand that simply being there is also a form of giving.

Having successfully resolved the problem with the police, we went on sharing the same apartment without being able to find that word which would surrender our soul. Surrender our soul? But then who would be prepared to surrender their soul? Whatever next?

So what *did* we want? Nothing. We were exhausted and disillusioned.

On the pretext of my spending a holiday with my parents, we separated. Besides, my friend was planning a trip to Piauí. With an emotional handshake, we said goodbye at the airport. We both knew that we would never see each other again, unless by chance. And what is more: we did not wish to see each other again. We knew that we were friends. Good friends.

A WORD ABOUT TAXI-DRIVERS

Could it be that being a taxi-driver is a real vocation? I sometimes think so, for most of them seem to do the job so well. The silence is suddenly broken when they light a cigarette and ask me if I'd like one. I never refuse. And the number of children they seem to have! But they assure me they can make enough money to feed all of them. And the number of indiscreet questions they ask. I can nearly always find an answer. The most interesting thing of all is that conversation with a taxi-driver is never fatuous. I have never understood why this should be. When they notice my disfigured hand, the conversation invariably turns to the danger of fire in the home. As far as I can gather, all of these taxi-drivers or people they know, have been badly burned at some time or other. They tell me: It's very painful. No need to tell me. In fact, ever since that fire, which almost cost me my life, broke out in my apartment, it's amazing how many people I have met who have been through the same experience. It would appear to be contagious.

THE MORNING SEA

The sea. I no longer bathe in the sea because I am too lazy. I no longer have the patience to go through the inevitable ritual: having to change in a bathing-hut, getting sand caked on one's skin. And whenever I bathe in the sea, my hair always gets wet. Then, once back in the apartment, I need to take a shower to wash off all the salt.

But one of these days I shall write at greater length about the sea. In fact, I might as well start right now. Let me tell you about the smell of the sea which sometimes leaves me inebriated.

I have an acquaintance who lives in the northern part of the city, but that is no excuse for never having bathed in the sea. I was amazed when she told me. And I promised her that we would go for a bathe together at six o'clock one morning. Why at six? Because that is the hour when the sea is a place of immense solitude. How can I describe it? The sea is like a great maternal

cradle yet, however maternal, the smell itself is so masculine. Perhaps a perfect fusion of the masculine and feminine. At six in the morning even the spume looks whiter.

JASMINE

I shall have more to say about the sea anon because it is never far from my thoughts. But I was telling you about the smell of the sea and that reminded me of jasmine. Jasmine belongs to the night. And it is slowly killing me. I put up a struggle but then give in because I feel that its perfume is stronger than me, and so I die. But when I awaken, I am somehow revived.

THE LUCIDITY OF THE ABSURD

I am not going to introduce Millôr Fernandes: anyone who knows him must be aware that I should have to write several pages to introduce so versatile a man. We have been friends for many years.

We last met ages ago and our conversation could scarcely have been more relaxed or frank. We understood each other perfectly and our conversation went more or less as follows:

– How are you, Millôr, *profoundly* speaking?

– I am getting on as *profoundly* as ever. I can think of no other way of living. And I am paying the price.

– Sometimes that price is too high. How did you come to write *O homem do princípio ao fim* [Man from Beginning to End] all those years ago? It was such a splendid and moving play. I'd love to see it again. Isn't it time the play was revived?

– I wrote the play at the request of my good friend, the one and only Fernanda Montenegro. In that play I tried to emphasize the human factor which is an essential feature of all my work.

– What can you tell me about your experience as an actor?

– Wonderful and futile. Wonderful because of the feeling that one can actually communicate with an audience and that is always exciting. Futile because I have no control over the outcome of such an experience. The communication I seek is something very different, something much more intimate and decisive.

– Millôr, have you ever felt in all humility that certain something people often refer to as a state of grace? It isn't really grace but something much more commonplace: the sudden perception of earthly things as they really are.

– If people call that grace, *that's fine by me*. For that's how I see it. I never have the feeling that anything I see is commonplace. I have absolutely no notion of earthly things as they really are. But this perception you speak of, this perception of the absurd, that is something I really do experience in moments of great passion. I honestly believe that one of these days this clear vision of things will drive me mad.

– What was your childhood like?

– Extremely awkward and very beautiful! Méier in those days was almost rural. I learned to swim in a swamp full of frogs. I discovered love in a backyard where I made dolls from plasticine with all the little girls. This childhood of mine lasted until the age of ten. Then one day, my mother died. I spent hours under the bed crying my heart out. I achieved the tranquillity of disbelief. Yes, I mean it. At the age of ten.

– How would you say inspiration comes in your case?

– I would say it comes in all sorts of ways. But I don't believe it is entirely unconscious. However unconscious it may seem, I'm convinced the nucleus of inspiration can stem from any experience – an image, a sound, a moment of sadness or anguish – perhaps forgotten and then unexpectedly recalled by some external factor. My own case is rather special: I'm not so much a writer, as someone who writes to earn a living.

We discussed various people and then I asked him:

– Whom do you admire and why?

– I'll be brave and opt for someone of my own generation, Vinícius de Morais. We are so alike and yet so different. But he is my choice. For there is a poet who sees what really matters in life.

One topic leads to another, and for some reason we start discussing death.

– Death seems to be something of an obsession in your plays, I suggested.

– Death intrigues me – perhaps because I feel it is still remote. I should really like to die, if you'll forgive the pun, in order to live the experience. So long as I'm allowed to come back and tell people what it was like.

We then resumed our conversation about life and the things which mattered most to us.

– Human relationships, said Millôr. Love. The passion that comes with love. Also those 'forbidden' love affairs between two men or two women. Since I am what society chooses to call a 'normal', 'healthy' heterosexual, those so-called 'abnormal' relationships demand my respect.

– If you were not a playwright, what would you want to be?

– An athlete. At heart, I am a frustrated athlete. Moreover, this is the only frustration which has stuck with me since those anguished years of adolescence between the ages of ten and seventeen.

– As far as your writing goes, do you feel you have improved with the years?

– I believe so. Especially if I compare my early efforts with what I now write, which doesn't say all that much, since I started writing for newspapers at the age of thirteen. Only a halfwit could have failed to make some progress. I am constantly in search of renewal for I have never lost my interest in new forms and different ways of seeing things.

– And when it comes to life and one's lifestyle, do you feel any progress comes with experience?

– I believe so. But perhaps others might disagree. Nothing surprises me any more. I even hear people say I am 'aggressive' whilst I have always thought of myself as being one of the most amiable of human beings.

Perhaps I'm wrong.

In any case, I am utterly convinced that genius is rooted in kindness. That's what I tend to look for.

I could not have agreed more with him about kindness.

SECRETS

There are times when my ignorance ceases to be some deficiency and becomes almost palpable, just as one sometimes feels able to touch darkness. When ignorance is seen as a deficiency, it can make one feel uneasy and inadequate: in a word, it can make one feel *ignorant*. And when it becomes almost palpable like darkness, it disturbs me. What has recently disturbed me, and it really is offensive since I am not to blame, is an ignorance which has been imposed on me. What has recently upset me is knowing that in a number of countries there are scientists secretly carrying out experiments which could revolutionize my whole existence. Why do they insist on guarding these secrets? Because they are relying on them in order to make new discoveries and are afraid that to publicize them would cause panic since their experiments are still in the early stages.

And so even in this modern age I feel as if I might as well be living in the Middle Ages. I have been robbed of my own epoch. But would I understand their secrets if they were revealed to me? Surely there would be some means of coming to grips with them.

At the same time I feel hopeful about the implications of those secrets. The scientists are treating us as if we were children who should not be exposed to certain truths too soon. Yet children can intuit those truths, they can sense their presence like some strange noise coming from who knows where. I, too, can hear a whisper which sounds promising. At least I know these secrets exist, and that they are capable of completely transforming my physical and psychic perception of the world. Oh, if only I knew more about those secrets. But all I have is the meagre satisfaction of the conditional: 'If only I knew more'. I must cheerfully resign myself. The more tenuous one's happiness, the more precious it becomes. And the more one clings to that almost invisible thread of hope that one day those secrets will be revealed.

AN ADOLESCENT: C.J.

He is big with broad shoulders. He walks slightly bent. This can happen and is obviously the burden of adolescence. He is slow and lost in thought; he sows at his leisure. His coarse peasant face betrays the silent depths of the peasant. He will sleep well with a woman by his side. Unless he gets caught up in the prolonged and deep meanderings of his ponderous vacillations. He is silent. He has not learned to express himself like other people. And so he says nothing. He is unaware of his long, straight legs, strong and comely. He once opened his mouth and said something: I want any job that will earn me a living: but in the meantime I want to be doing something 'concrete and practical'. He is clumsy, breaks things unintentionally, asks to be forgiven with a startled grin. One has to be patient with him. One has to be patient with big fellows like him. One needs a lot of patience. For he could so easily turn into one of those brooding, clumsy men for the rest of his life and never be anything else. His is one of the most dangerous kinds of adolescence: the adolescent who has prematurely turned into a slightly bent man and in whom one can sense stature without words.

ARTISTS WHO DO NOT PRACTISE ART

B.D. has the penetrating eye of the photographer who knows that the same image never comes twice. In his search, he does not practise art: he searches like someone who has no intention of revealing what he has seen. Besides, the things he sees are not easy to communicate. He makes no serious attempt to bring together what he has seen and felt. This makes him a non-artist. But every man ought to be at least this kind of non-artist, so that his spirit may survive.

AN OMINOUS AFTERNOON

First the heavy sky and atmosphere. The sky had descended closer to earth and turned the colour of lead. Nebulous clearings, restless swamps, horizons blurred by the imminent rainstorm. Trees and plants will soon be submerged in water, dark, leaden landscape. I turn pale but not with fear: for I am also under threat from the brewing tempest. Nature in turmoil. The birds escape.

HOW DOES ONE DEFINE HOPE?

But if hope runs through everything, then all is not lost. Yet hope is not for tomorrow. Hope is now. Some other name should be used for hope because this word implies, above all, expectancy. And hope is now. There must be a word to express what I am trying to say.

DIFFICULT TO EXPRESS

When you cannot find the words to express what is actually there, you have the impression of being blind. At such moments one stops for a coffee. Not that coffee helps one to find the right word but it represents a wild gesture of liberation, a gratuitous act which brings freedom.

What I feel, I do not put into action. What I put into action, I do not think. What I think, I do not feel. I am unaware of what I know. I am not unaware of what I feel. I do not understand myself yet behave as if I had no difficulty in doing so.

A MORAL LESSON

I am forever questioning taxi-drivers but one day a taxi-driver decided to question me. He asked me a number of indiscreet questions but one in particular struck me as being somewhat odd. He asked me: 'Do you think of yourself as being just like any other woman?' (His difficulty in pronouncing certain words betrayed him as a North-easterner). I answered: 'More or less', without really knowing what he meant.

'Too true', he went on, 'I feel I'm just as good as the next man. I used to be a beggar. And now I'm a taxi-driver. And although I once begged for a living, I don't feel any different from anyone else. That's why I'm teaching you a moral lesson.' Did I deserve to be taught this lesson? I never found out because we parted the best of friends, wishing each other the best of luck. No doubt we were both in need of it.

A friend of mine expressed surprise when I told her: she had always believed that once a man was reduced to begging there was no further hope of improving his lot. But not only had this man given up begging but he now owned a taxi he was paying for by instalments and he was earning good money. No longer a beggar, he sees it as his duty to teach me a moral lesson even though I did not ask for one. I detest moral lessons. When I see the conversation is moving in that direction – or as the moralists would say 'turning to higher things' – I go silent and beat a hasty retreat. I resist all moral lessons. And in this sense I am getting worse.

'I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY'

Feel free to tell me what interests you and what you would like me to write about. I won't make any rash promises because the theme has to *strike a chord* and find me in the right mood. Besides, the themes that interest you may mean nothing to me, so I must reserve the right to say: 'I have nothing to say'.

I was once invited to give a lecture at the University of Vitória in Espírito Santo. In the end I agreed because the people there

were so congenial and I enjoy being with students. I agreed on condition I would not be expected to give a formal lecture but simply to answer questions as if in conversation. I also reserved the sacred right to refuse to answer if I had nothing useful to say. The seminar was a great success.

Apart from one student, who decided to be awkward. He sat on his own at the back of the hall although there was plenty of room in front, and spoke in a low voice which made it almost impossible for me to hear what he was saying. I told him I could not hear a word whereupon he raised his voice without the slightest effort. Eventually he moved down nearer the front and told me in a loud, defiant voice that he did not understand a word in any of my books. But after some discussion he became less aggressive. And Vitória is a lovely city.

Which reminds me that I owe an apology to the student who organized a 'Meet the Author' session on my behalf. I accepted the invitation and promised to be there. But I had to be back in Rio to keep an engagement, and on the day fixed for the 'Meet the Author' session there was no plane to Espírito Santo. I telephoned, explaining my dilemma. The student was not at home so I left a message. But he clearly never received it because I later discovered that a group of students had been waiting to receive me at the airport. So here is my message to that student: You may count on my presence the next time you organize a 'Meet the Author' session on my behalf. Feel free to name a date and time.

A NOVELIST

Marques Rebelo has the same crew-cut as in the days when I first knew him, also the same darting, mischievous eyes. But there is something new in his expression. It is somehow kinder than before, clearly a sign of maturity. As a young man he was notorious for his wicked tongue which spared no one. Time and experience and an inevitable weariness have softened his heart.

Marques Rebelo is a pseudonym. His real name is Edy Dias da Cruz, a name which suggests an entirely different person. Marques Rebelo thought he must have something a little more harmonious for his *nom de plume* and gave himself a new name. He believes everyone is entitled to a second baptism with a name of his or her own choosing. Today he is known to all his readers as Marques Rebelo. He started writing as a boy. Dissatisfied with those early efforts, he destroyed his note-books. At the age of nineteen he published poems in Modernist journals such as *Antropofagia* [Cannibalism] and *Verde* [Green]. Rereading those poems today, he finds them embarrassing. At the age of twenty-one he was doing military service when he wrote *Oscarina*, a collection of short stories he still regards with affection. This was followed by *Três caminhos* [Three Routes], *Marafa, A estrela sobe* [Rising Star] and *Stella me abriu a porta* [Stella opened the door]. He then abandoned fiction for some years before writing *Espelho partido* [Broken Mirror], a novel in diary form which interprets life in Brazil as something composed of infinite fragments. He wrote this work over a considerable period of time and with painstaking effort. Marques Rebelo is the type of author who writes with dogged determination rather than wait for inspiration. He follows a disciplined regime even if only to discard much of his material, and he is capable of revising what he has written as much as thirty times. He considers the redrafting of a text even more important than the actual writing.

He prefers to work late into the night. Silence helps his concentration. This is something he discovered in his youth when he had to go out to work during the day.

The most exciting book he has ever read is *Niels Lyhne* by Jens Peter Jacobsen: a book he would have loved to have written himself.

When asked to comment on younger writers, he confesses that in his opinion his own contemporaries are still holding the fort. He finds that younger writers have not yet clarified their aims, almost as if they were inhibited by the wide horizons stretching before them. However well or badly, he feels that he at least is conveying a clear message to his readers. And while he agrees that as a writer he is closely associated with the Rio scene, he sees this as a question of circumstances rather than any special quality on his part.

When asked how he spends his time in the Brazilian Academy of Letters, he replies with a smile that he is marking time before going to his grave. He has no complaints to make about his critics, only about himself. The most decisive moment in his life was probably when he decided to become a writer.

He has always earned a modest living from various part-time jobs, leaving himself enough time to read and write. He is a compulsive reader. And for him, writing is most important: his stronghold of freedom. When he is not writing he simply enjoys life.

Literature, he confesses, rarely earns one friends: at best, it helps one acquire some agreeable enemies. As a writer he feels lonely; as a man there are so many things in life to keep him occupied.

He was born in Vila Isabel. Since then he has lived in Tijuca, Botafogo and Laranjeiras, districts with their own individual character. He likes to think of Rio as a city which embraces a number of smaller cities.

His favourite football club? América, the one passion in his life. This team has almost driven him to distraction. América is forever losing.

He enjoys going to the cinema, but prefers the theatre.

And if there is a high price to be paid in life, he believes it is worth it.

A CONDUCTOR'S CAREER

Isaac Karabtchevsky electrifies the most indifferent audience when he conducts, such are the emotions he arouses. Apart from the unique experience of hearing him conduct, just to watch him is a spectacle in itself. He puts his heart and soul into every performance. He becomes enraptured, oblivious of his own existence, and lives the score to the full. No sooner is the concert over than he descends from the podium in a state of sheer exhaustion, the perspiration running down his face. But if things have gone well, he is the happiest man in the world.

Incredible though it may seem, he loathed music at school and found practice boring and tedious. In those days he never thought he would turn to conducting as a career and spend the rest of his life studying musical scores. But even as a boy he would listen to a fugue by Bach for hours on end and work out his own variations. And from an early age he developed a passion for polyphony and intricate details of musical counterpoint. And then he began to think of music as a totality, as the combination of different voices and instruments, rather than interest himself merely in the soloist's contribution. But even in those days, music was simply a pastime to help him forget the trials of adolescence. The young Karabtchevsky had few friends and little leisure. At the age of fifteen, he was obliged to earn some money to help support his family and found employment selling clothes for children. Needless to say, he was no salesman. When trying to persuade some mother to buy a white outfit for her child, he would tell her persuasively: 'You can be sure it won't lose its colour'. But like the plant which unconsciously starts to grow, he began to develop his natural love of music: he formed a choir in the college where he was studying, and rehearsed by ear without knowing a single note: he would improvise variations with tenors, basses and sopranos, and rehearsals were a revelation; he conducted his first concert standing on a chair because the college did not possess a podium.

At the age of seventeen he decided to go and live on a *kibbutz* in Israel. There he worked on the land. Back in Brazil, he enrolled at the Mackenzie Institute in São Paulo where he studied electronics,

which he felt could be useful. But once he had to cope with welding and casting iron, voltmeters and ammeters and endless measurements and calculations, he became increasingly frustrated and unhappy. Just as things were becoming unbearable, the Pro-Arte Foundation established its own Academy of Music which was located behind the cemetery attached to the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows. The Academy's first director was Koelbreutter, a German musician who taught a complicated system based on the theory of twelve-tone music, otherwise known as *dodecaphonism*. At this point, Karabtchevsky finally made up his mind that he would become a professional musician.

He applied himself to his musical studies with passion and conviction. He studied day and night with little rest, and within four years he had mastered what others barely learned in ten. Sensing the need to make closer contact with older traditions, he left for Europe in 1958. But not before founding the Renaissance Madrigal Group which was to change the whole musical scene in Brazil.

Karabtchevsky's career as a conductor both in Brazil and abroad has been nothing short of prodigious, yet he insists he still has ambitions to fulfil. Of one thing, however, he is certain: his whole existence is linked to music, like the oyster to its shell.

He sought out Adolfo Bloch who ran the magazine *Manchete* [Headline] and confided his ambition to give an open-air concert with the Rio Symphony Orchestra, so that classical music might be brought to audiences of every social class and background. Adolfo Bloch told him: Why think in terms of three thousand people when you can perform for thirty thousand? Bloch then summoned his staff and they drew up plans for a grand concert at the Monumento das Pracinhas with the participation of the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra and three military bands with cannons and bells. The main item on the programme was the *1812 Overture* by Tchaikovsky. Karabtchevsky was sceptical at first about this joint collaboration. He had always had serious reservations about concerts on this scale for mass audiences. But as the orchestra reached the closing section with its Russian hymn, he could see out of the corner of his eye the audience surging towards him. And heading this onslaught with tears in his eyes, was Adolfo Bloch.

Karabtchevsky is of the firm opinion that what Brazil needs in order to develop musically is a complete and radical reform of teaching methods, not so much for the sake of training professional

musicians as for the enlightenment of future generations who will listen to music with pleasure and genuine interest.

He was much criticized for giving a concert devoted to music by Chico Buarque. The purists were outraged. Karabtchevsky was not trying to combine popular and classical music. He wanted to attract young audiences who were eager for something new. A concert devoted to Chico's music was a serious attempt to foster their interest in the best of contemporary music.

WHAT PEDRO BLOCH TOLD ME

1 – What people refer to as my generosity is perhaps simply my responsiveness to the world around me. I am collective. I carry the world inside me. I find that every human being has a unique, irreplaceable, universal dimension. Because of my respect for every human being on this Earth, because I like people and enjoy liking them, I find the universe reflected in each individual. I'm sorry, but I even like those who don't like me. And I certainly like those who do.

2 – I'm not sure whether I'm as great a doctor as you claim. I am a famous playwright as statistics confirm. But not being great at anything, I behave as if I were. When I treat a patient, I try to do my best. When I write a play, I'm convinced I'm working on the most important thing in the world. But I am in no sense complete. To be complete suggests that one is fulfilled. And to be fulfilled suggests that one is fully accomplished. And once someone is fully accomplished there is no further need for renewal. I live by completing myself in others and there is still some way to go.

3 – The world consists of all of us. We are responsible one to the other, one for the other, and for what we have made of the world. Only after renewing myself should I feel empowered to renew the world.

4 – In order to capture all the wonderful things said by children, one simply has to listen. I feel proud when people refer to me as 'the man who tells stories for children'. Children are on the same wavelength. And I scarcely notice any difference in our ages. Children taught me all those expressions such as: 'pink is just another shade of red... slowly getting redder', 'that poor little train going up the Sugar Loaf Mountain... thinks it is an aeroplane', 'the cat died... because the cat stepped out of its fur and all that was left was a corpse.'* Children have taught me things even wise men don't know.

* 'o cor-de-rosa é um vermelho... mas muito devagar', 'coitado do trenzinho do Pão de Açúcar... está pensando que é avião', 'o gato morreu... porque o gato saiu do gato e ficou só o corpo do gato'.

5 – No one can hope to master everything. Especially in today's world with its rapid means of communication and constant flow of information. One can scarcely keep abreast of advances in one's own profession. I am haunted by a sense of responsibility. So I start my working day at five o'clock each morning in order to study and learn from those who know more than I do.

6 – Yes, all thirty of my plays have been performed. I once had the satisfaction of knowing that one of my plays was being performed in every continent on the same day.

7 – What do I think about love? I don't. I simply love. I had the good fortune to meet Míriam. People often confuse selfishness with love. They tend to mistake sex for love. And refer to all sorts of things as love which have nothing to do with love. Until men and women learn how to define love, until they understand that love has nothing to do with possessiveness, with egocentricity and organization, that love is not a question of reassurance and satisfaction, love will not be love. What makes the world go round in any positive sense is truth. Even if only fleeting. Even if it only offers a path rather than a goal. Words stifle everything: love, truth, the world. Until man seriously comes to terms with himself, he will go on viewing the world through a distorted lens and build a world in which the Moon becomes his first priority, a world in which there will be more Moon than moonlight.

8 – It has often occurred to me that, when people are beginning to lose their memory, they decide to write their memoirs. My memory is still in reasonable order. And as for any diary I might write, it would reveal nothing about me and a great deal about people whom I love. That's why I prefer to write about them rather than keep a diary.

9 – I once wrote a recipe for life which I feel says everything about me. To live is to grow and illuminate. To live is to break down barriers between man and the universe. To understand. To know that we are often prisoners of ourselves, that we spend our lives polishing the bars instead of trying to free ourselves. I try to discover the unique and universal dimension in others. We cannot be forever living great moments, but we can prepare for them. We are only what we do to others. And we are conditioned by those actions. Success is not the most important thing in life. Fulfilling oneself is more important than being fulfilled. Once fulfilled, man has dotted the final *i*. I have a deep respect for all humanity. An enormous respect for life. I believe

in men. I even trust con men. I try to identify with my fellow human-beings. I do not swim in a pool when I have the sea. I enjoy loving others. Not to be up and doing...exhausts me. I have more faith in truth than in goodness. I see truth as the essence of goodness, a goodness likely to endure. I have faults but I try to forget them in my own way. For as an old Spanish proverb reminds us: 'Knowing how to forget evil is another way of remembering'.*

10 – Do I believe in miracles? I believe in nothing but miracles. There is nothing more miraculous than the reality of each moment. I believe in the supernatural. The supernatural would be an inadequate explanation of things natural if the latter were capable of being explained. When I said this to Gilberto Amado, he insisted on writing it down. So it must mean something.

11 – There is no merit in my love for Míriam for she embodies all women. She accompanies me in everything. In my work, she is my closest collaborator, in my work, in my life, in everything. She is so selfless by nature that it could easily be mistaken for coldness. I have never detected so much as a gesture, word or attitude in Míriam that was not for the good of others. I knew I wanted to marry her the moment I met her. And now that I have come to know her so much better, I feel like renewing those marriage vows every day.

12 – My plays are initially rooted in experience, then written and structured. The structure comes last. I only write about things I myself have experienced, felt and suffered or glimpsed in others, even if the worst has passed. Truth is always the most effective form of protest.

13 – I can say in all sincerity that I like everyone, even myself.

* 'Saber olvidar lo malo también es tener memoria.'

A MEDIUM'S DIAGNOSIS

I have become acquainted with someone called Maria Augusta who is a medium and known professionally as Eva. Alas, I know nothing about spiritualism and the medium's powers.

A friend brought Eva to my house. She cast a tranquil eye over my papers which lay scattered in disarray in the corner of the room where I normally work. She began to speak and compared my lack of discipline with that of 'a young colt'. I asked her how she would cope with this undisciplined animal. To my annoyance, she replied that the most obvious measure was to use reins. I assured her that was the last thing I had in mind.

Since Eva is much experienced in matters of life and death, I listened attentively as she explained that the first step towards achieving peace is to accept one's many faults.

Eva spoke with an eloquence and conviction beyond my powers. She told me that, despite all the flaws in my nature, I should *soldier on*. She found me rather impressionable and warned me: 'Try to keep a cool head and a warm heart. You are much too passionate and impulsive.' Eva felt I was capable of doing great things but no less capable of wrecking everything. She then went on to remind me that there was only one law: the law of cause and effect. These pronouncements were made with the utmost solemnity as I sat there, taking in every word. Serene authority shone from those great moist eyes.

Eva went on to say that we waste a great deal of energy trying to be like others. Amen. She approved of my *Amen*.

She could tell I am often intolerant of others. I tried to explain that I get annoyed with people who do not understand me. Because at heart, I am not difficult to understand. At least, that is my opinion.

MUMMY'S ESCAPADES

She was well aware that she should at all times show that consummate dignity children expect of mothers. And, of course, she was a mother worthy of the name.

But now and then, like 'a wild colt', as Eva might say, she would go off on some escapade. Her latest escapade was when she went out shopping on her own and saw a man selling popcorn on the street-corner. So she bought some and munched her popcorn as she walked along the pavement. Not exactly 'the done thing'. How could she persuade her family that as well as being a mother she was also a person? A person who felt she had the right to munch popcorn wherever she liked. Amen. (This seems to be my day for saying *Amen*.)

FREE PROPAGANDA

Since it spends most of its life writing, the typewriter acquires exceptional importance. I find myself becoming irritated with my typewriter or thanking it for faithfully printing out the things I feel. In a word: I humanize my typewriter.

When I first became a journalist, I had a semi-portable Underwood. How I loved that typewriter. It served me so well and typed no fewer than seven books. Not forgetting that I made endless revisions. Every one of my books might run to four hundred pages of typescript and these were often revised as many as eleven times before I was satisfied. After completing seven books, which amounted to almost twenty for the poor typewriter, my beloved Underwood felt the strain and began to behave as if it were suffering from rheumatism. I then bought a portable Olympia. This helped me to complete another five books in addition to all the other items I published in between times. Then my Olympia started to show signs of fatigue. I had it repaired and my Olympia was as good as new. But now it was my turn to get tired of those minute characters.

So I acquired a portable Remington, but it rattled so much that the noise began to get on my nerves. So I did a swop with Tati de Morais who gave me her Olivetti, which is a dream: the sound is low, restful and discreet. It allows me to type during the night without disturbing anyone. And there is none of that rattling one gets with other typewriters. In future I shall stick to an Olivetti. And once it begins to show signs of wearing out, I shall replace it with yet another Olivetti. Typewriters are just like people and they often break down from sheer exhaustion. The best solution would be to buy another Olivetti to keep in reserve because I cannot permit myself the luxury of giving up writing.

Machines, whatever their use, are mysterious. I respect their mystery.

And now I have gone back to using my old portable Olympia. I really am fickle when it comes to machines.

ALL BECAUSE OF A CRACKED SPOUT

These events apparently took place a long time ago but my informant assured me they are true.

Here is what happened:

Jane was twenty-eight years old and Bob Douglas thirty-two. They had been married for four years and were living happily, as one might say, in London's Soho.

One afternoon, Jane was serving tea when Bob suddenly threw a tantrum:

– God, how it sickens me to see you use that old teapot with its cracked spout every day! I can't stand it any longer!

Jane, who was usually placid, lost her temper:

– Well, why don't you go out and buy a decent teapot if you think you can afford it?

Whereupon Bob – and this appears to have been their first quarrel – left the room and went out slamming the door behind him. He was later seen in a pub, no doubt trying to steady his nerves, and then simply disappeared. Just like that: he vanished into thin air. Jane was flabbergasted.

Some months later Jane learned from a mutual acquaintance that he had bumped into Bob in a café in Paris. Bob had signed up for five years' service in the Foreign Legion. The acquaintance promised Jane he would try to find out where Bob was staying in Paris.

When the letter arrived with Bob's address, Jane was as excited as if she had received a Christmas present. She wrote at once and Bob replied.

He apologized for not having written sooner:

'My darling, when I finally came to my senses, I did everything possible to secure my release. Please help me to get out of this mess or at least try and come to Paris. I cannot wait to be with you again. I miss you so badly.'

Jane worked like someone possessed. Coping with two jobs, she worked fifteen hours a day. During the day she was employed as a barmaid; at night as a cloakroom attendant in a Soho night-club.

Until she had saved enough money to make the journey to

Paris. But all her efforts and sacrifices (even to the extent of going without food) proved futile. Bob had been posted to North Africa. Jane pleaded with officers of the Foreign Legion at the Quai d'Orsay to release her husband. She wept her heart out. She also wept because she was far too embarrassed to confide the cause of this fiasco: all because of a teapot with a cracked spout.

Who would ever have believed her? The officers listened politely but pointed out that under no circumstances could her husband be released until he had served his five years with the Legion. Only then would he be allowed to return to England.

There was nothing for it but to return to London and carry on working and saving for the long sea-voyage aboard a cargo-ship to Sidi-bel-Abbes.

Jane's savings were growing when she received another letter from Bob: My darling, I am in the depths of despair. They are posting me to Indochina.

He became so depressed that he made himself ill and was sent to hospital. His fellow legionnaires departed and many of them died in Dien-Bien-Phu. Jane, in the meantime, tried to join the International Red Cross or the Merchant Navy. But without success.

One month later, Bob was declared fit and posted to Indochina. As the ship was going up the Suez Canal he jumped overboard along with four Italians.

The Egyptian police took them into custody as illegal immigrants. Back in London, Jane hounded officials at the Foreign Office in her determination to secure Bob's release. She became so distraught that she finally confessed why he had signed up in the first place. It sounded far-fetched but it was true.

– This would never have happened, she exclaimed with some embarrassment, had it not been for that old teapot with a cracked spout.

How I wish I knew what eventually became of Jane and Bob, and I am sure you must share my curiosity.

A MERE SPECK OF DUST

And all of a sudden that terrible pain in my left eye, tears streaming down my face, and the world becoming sinister. And distorted; for on closing one eye the other automatically half-

closes. No fewer than four times during the past year some strange object has got into my left eye: on two occasions a speck of dust, once a grain of sand, and on the last occasion an eyelash. All four times I was obliged to consult an optician. On my last visit I asked this man who is entrusted, as it were, with our vision of the world, why it should always be the left eye. A mere coincidence?

The answer was in the negative. He explained that, however normal a person's eyesight, one eye sees better than the other and is therefore more sensitive. He referred to it as the guiding-eye. And because the latter is more sensitive, it picks up any foreign body in the atmosphere and there it remains.

In other words, our best eye is at the same time more powerful and more delicate: it creates problems which are not imaginary but all too real. As in the case of this unbearable pain when a speck of dust is grazing and irritating one of the most delicate organs of our body. I remained pensive.

Does this only happen to our eyes? Could it be that those who see things more clearly are also those who feel and suffer most? And those who are afflicted with pain as real as that caused by a speck of dust? I remained pensive.

Suddenly I have remembered that a New Year is about to begin. Let us hope that nineteen seventy-four will turn out to be a happy year for all of us.

Glossary

Açude da Solidão. Picturesque spot in Rio, north of the Alto da Boa Vista.

Almeida, Dr José Carlos Cabral de. Dietician who ran a successful clinic in Rio. Clarice Lispector was one of his clients.

Alto Sertão. Hilly region in the State of Pernambuco.

Amado, Gilberto (1887-1969). Poet, novelist, journalist, politician and diplomat. Born in Sergipe, he worked in Pernambuco. He made an important contribution to intellectual life with a steady output of articles and essays on political and social issues which appeared regularly in newspapers and journals in Recife and Rio.

Angra dos Reis. A shabby little coastal town some sixty kilometres west of Mangaratiba in the State of Rio. The lands nearby were discovered in 1502 and a colonial settlement established in 1556. The port was initially developed for the exportation of agricultural produce from São Paulo and Minas Gerais. Slave-worked sugar refineries dominated the local economy. Now mainly used as a point of access to the outlying islands in the Bay. Several interesting churches, the old town hall and the jail in the Praça Nilo Peçanha have survived from the late colonial period.

Antonioni, Michelangelo (1912-). Italian film director. Major films include *L'Avventura* (1959), *Red Desert* (1964), *Blow-Up* (1966) and *The Passenger* (1975). His films probe modern alienation and subordinate dialogue to visual images.

Antunes Filho, Arnaldo. Brazilian poet and highly successful theatre director.

Arap, Fauzi. Brazilian playwright and theatre director. He directed a play based on texts by Clarice Lispector which was performed at the Maison de France in Rio.

Athayde, Tristão de. See under *Lima*, Alceu Amoroso.

Aymé, Marcel (1902-1967). French novelist, essayist and playwright belatedly recognized as a master of light irony and vivid narrative. After a brief career in journalism, Aymé turned to creative writing. Many of his short stories make their impact with a subtle game of counterpoint between fantasy and reality.

Azulay, Dr. Brazilian psychiatrist. His consulting rooms were situated on the fashionable Avenida Nossa Senhora de Copacabana.

Bagé. A town with a certain charm situated near the border which separates Rio Grande do Sul from Argentina and Uruguay. A cattle and commercial centre, the town's annual folklore festival in July attracts a large number of tourists and visitors.

Belém do Pará, Situated on the Amazon river estuary, the city was founded by the Portuguese in 1616 and dedicated to Our Lady of Bethlehem. It rapidly became the port where slaves were traded and a source for cocoa and spices from the Amazon. The

rubber boom at the turn of the century transformed Belém into a modern city and the economic centre of the north. Many historical landmarks and notable examples of Portuguese colonial architecture have been preserved.

Belo Horizonte. The capital of Minas Gerais. The third largest city in Brazil, this thriving metropolis is second only to São Paulo in terms of industrial output. Belo Horizonte is surrounded by rich mining and agricultural hinterland which has made the state one of the wealthiest in Brazil. Tourists flock to the region's magnificent old colonial towns or *cidades históricas* such as Ouro Preto and Sabará.

Berenson, Bernard (1865-1959). American art critic and connoisseur, born in Lithuania. He was a gifted conversationalist, wit and arbiter of taste. Berenson's publications include *Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (1894) and *Drawings of the Florentine Painters* (1903).

Bergson, Henri (1859-1941). French philosopher, awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1927. His most influential studies were *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *The Creative Mind* (1934). *Le Rire* was published in 1924.

Bernanos, Georges (1888-1948). French author whose works were influenced by Roman Catholic doctrine and his own mystical outlook. His novels include *Journal d'un curé de campagne* [Diary of a Country Priest] (1936) which established his reputation abroad, and *Les grands cimitières sous la lune* [The Great Cemeteries under the Moon] (1938) in which he condemned Franco's rise to power in Spain.

Bernardes, Sérgio. Brazilian architect and a pioneer in modern urban developments.

Besouchet, Marino. Deceased. Well-known Trotskyist who moved in intellectual circles in Rio.

Betânia, Maria. One of Brazil's most popular women singers in recent years.

Blériot, Louis (1872-1936) French aviator and inventor. On 25 July 1909 he became the first person to fly the English Channel in a heavier-than-air machine.

Bloch, Adolfo. A relation of Pedro Bloch and owner of *Manchete* [Headline], one of Brazil's most popular illustrated magazines.

Bloch, Míriam. Audiologist and wife of the Brazilian playwright Pedro Bloch.

Bloch, Pedro (1914-). Medical practitioner and playwright. He was born in the Ukraine but brought to Brazil at the age of three. He wrote his first play in 1940 and many more were to follow. He became a member of the Brazilian Academy and theatre director of the PEN Club in Brazil. In 1951, Bloch was nominated for the prize awarded annually by the Brazilian Association of

Critics for *As Mãos de Euridyce* [Eurydice's Hands]. A number of Bloch's plays have been adapted for television.

Bolama. An island in the Archipelago of Guinea-Bissau. The island is fertile and inhabited by a number of tribes. Discovered by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and ruled by the military, Bolama's occupation was contested by the English but the United States arbitrated in favour of Portugal in 1870. The island exports rubber, ivory, hides and oils.

Bonfim, Otávio. Journalist with *O Globo* [The Globe]. He specialised in politics and became the newspaper's correspondent in Washington.

Bonomi, Maria. Italian-born artist who settled in São Paulo in 1944. She studied painting and engraving in Brazil before working with Hans Muller at Columbia University in New York from 1957 until 1959. Back in Brazil she began to specialize in engraving, set up her own studio and did some teaching. Bonomi is regarded as one of the most talented and influential artists of her generation.

Bonsucesso. Suburb of Rio, facing the Islands of Sapucaia and Bom Jesus.

Botafogo. Elegant district in Rio which curves around the 800 metres between Flamengo and Rio's yacht club. There are several important museums located here, notably the Museum of Rui Barbosa which was once the home of this eminent jurist, statesman and author; the Villa-Lobos Museum and the Museum of the Brazilian Indian.

Boticário, Largo do. Small public square located at the foot of the Corcovado on the Rua Cosme Velho. This charming spot with its colonial architecture evokes the Rio of another age.

Braga, Ernâni. Brazilian musician and composer. Braga taught at the Conservatory of Music in Recife, Pernambuco.

Braga, Rubem (1913-). Born in Cachoeiro do Itapemirim, Espírito Santo. A journalist and writer who perfected the *crônica* [chronicle], a genre peculiar to Brazil and as practised by Braga comparable with the best of the columnists who contribute regularly to prestigious newspapers and magazines in Europe. A regular contributor to all the important newspapers in Brazil, Braga was much admired as a columnist. Anthologies of Braga's *crônicas* were published in 1951 and 1958.

Brasília. The new capital of Brazil which was planned and inaugurated during the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-60). The architect appointed to carry out this ambitious project was Oscar Niemeyer, who had studied with Le Corbusier, while the urban planning was entrusted to the veteran Lúcio Costa.

Buarque, Chico (Francisco Buarque de Holanda). (1944-). Contemporary musician and composer who achieved fame with a

movement known as *Tropicalismo* which flourished in the 1960s. Chico Buarque and his fellow musicians based their songs on traditional popular music and mixed genres in a novel way. Many of their songs made lightly veiled criticism of political repression in Brazil, and Chico Buarque, along with other musicians, was exiled in the late 1960s. His dense lyrics and hauntingly beautiful melodies have helped him to retain his popularity as younger musicians and composers came to the fore.

Burt, Maxwell Struthers (1882-1954). American poet, novelist and essayist. In addition to a steady output of novels, he published his autobiography *The Diary of a Dude Wrangler* in 1924, and a social history of his favourite city: *Philadelphia, Holy Experiment* in 1945. Struthers Burt also taught for some time at Princeton.

Cabo Frio. Popular holiday resort on Rio's Costa do Sol. It was founded in 1815 but only developed for tourism in the twentieth century. The town itself is not particularly beautiful, but there are sand-dunes and beaches everywhere and a great deal of nightlife.

Callado, Antônio (1917-). Born in Niterói which lies across the strait at the mouth of Guanabara Bay. Poet, journalist, playwright and novelist, Callado contributed regularly to several newspapers. In late 1944 he embarked for London where he worked for the BBC. His memoirs of wartime London have inspired a recent novel *Memórias de Aldenham House* (1989). After a year in London he moved to Paris where he worked for the Brazilian Service of Radio-Diffusion Française until the autumn of 1945. This period in Europe was decisive for his literary career. Back in Brazil he began to write novels and plays while continuing to act as regular correspondent for the *Correio de Manhã* [Morning Post] and other newspapers. As a novelist he is noted for his refined prose. His major novel to date is *Quarup* (1968).

Camoens, Luís Vaz de, (1524?-1580). Portugal's national poet and one of the great masters of European literature. Influenced by Virgil, his epic poem *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads], narrates the voyage of Vasco da Gama and pays tribute to the Portuguese nation. The poet's vast output of plays, sonnets and lyrics was published posthumously.

Campos, Geir (1924-). Poet, writer, translator and playwright. His first book of poems *Rosa dos rumos* [Guiding Rose] was published in 1950. His verses are those of the poet interested in the events and concerns of everyday life. Other publications of note include *A Dictionary of Poetry and Poetics* and translations of works by Rilke and other German poets.

Campos, Paulo Mendes (1928-). Poet, journalist, and critic from

Minas Gerais who became Keeper of the Rare Book Collection in the National Library in Rio. His early poems appeared in Modernist journals in Belo Horizonte but by the early 1950s these were published in book form. His poetry is linked with that of the 1945 Generation but shows no rigid adherence to any school.

Cardoso, Joaquim Lúcio (1913-1968). Poet, novelist, critic, journalist and playwright. He spent his childhood in his native Minas Gerais until his family moved to Rio in 1923. He loathed school but loved reading, and covered an amazing range of national and foreign authors in his youth. He made his literary début in 1934 with a regional novel *Maleita* [Malaria]. His first major success, however, came in 1959 with the publication of *Crônica da Casa Assassinada* [Chronicle of a Murdered Household]. The novel has all the hallmarks of this accomplished writer: secure technique and complex characters with psychological depth. In 1966 he was awarded the Machado de Assis Prize by the Brazilian Academy of Letters.

Cardoso, Maria Helena (1903-). Born in Diamantina, Minas Gerais, but resides in Rio. Sister of the novelist Lúcio Cardoso, she studied medicine and graduated but never practised as a doctor. She wrote a book of memoirs *Por onde andou meu coração* [Where My Heart Strayed] (1967).

Carlito (Carlos Martins). The son of Justino and Lucinda Martins. He was married to the actress Camila Amado and died in a car accident.

Carrero, Tônia. Veteran Brazilian actress who has had a distinguished career on stage and in films. In the screen version of Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrêla* [The Hour of the Star], she played the role of the clairvoyant Madame Carlota.

Cascadura. Suburb of Rio de Janeiro.

Catete. The site of the presidential palace until 1960. This was where the Brazilian dictator Getúlio Vargas committed suicide in 1954. The palace was then used to house the Museum of the Republic and the grounds were converted into a public park.

Caxambu. A small spa town in the state of Minas Gerais much frequented by the Brazilian royal family in the nineteenth century. Dom Pedro II regularly took the waters, which were supposed to restore fertility as well as being beneficial in the treatment of stomach, liver and kidney complaints.

Chacrinha. Comic figure who became a household name as the risqué presenter of popular programmes on Brazilian television.

Chiado. The heart of Lisbon named after the poet António Ribeiro Chiado and situated in the area which extends from the Rua do Carmo to that of São Luís, from the statue of Camoens to the city's former Public Library. The oldest reference to the Chiado dates back to the Conquest of Lisbon itself.

Claudel, Paul (1868-1955). French dramatist, poet and diplomat. His writings, notably the odes and religious plays, reflect his deep faith as a Roman Catholic and his mystical tendencies.

Coimbra, Dr Lourival. Psychoanalyst who worked with Melanie Klein, a leading pioneer in this field, who ran a successful clinic in Rio.

Colasanti, Arduíno. Brazilian actor who has also appeared in films and on television.

Copacabana. One of Rio's most fashionable districts noted for its magnificent beaches, high-rise hotels, luxury apartments and shops. A popular residential area for the affluent, Copacabana is densely populated and overcrowded with tourists.

Cortázar, Julio (1914-84). Argentine writer born in Belgium who spent most of his adult life in Paris. An exponent of surrealism and experimental fiction, he achieved universal recognition after publishing his major novel *Rayuela* [Hopscotch] in 1963. He was an accomplished writer of short stories in every conceivable form and genre, and several of these were adapted for films.

Costa, Lúcio (1902-). Architect who drew up and supervised the pilot-plan for Brasília, the country's new capital, inaugurated in 1957.

Couto, Dr Miguel. One of Rio's most famous and successful physicians until his death in 1934.

Cruz Alta. District of Rio de Janeiro.

Cunha, Fausto (1923-). Born in Recife, he made his mark as an essayist and literary critic before founding and editing the journal *Ensaio* [Essay]. He went on to edit other journals and has contributed regularly to the literary supplements of many leading newspapers.

Curitiba. Founded in 1648 as a gold-mining site, Curitiba became the capital of Paraná in 1853. The city's inhabitants are largely of European origin, the descendants of Polish, German and Italian immigrants. European influence is evident in the houses and public buildings which have survived from the turn of the century.

Dantas, San Tiago (1911-1964). Professor of Law, politician, diplomat and well-known public figure noted for his vast erudition. Prominent in political circles, he represented Brazil at the United Nations and became Minister of Foreign Affairs. He published several books on jurisprudence. Both he and his wife Edméia were intimate friends of Clarice Lispector.

Dome, José de (1921-). Brazilian painter and designer. Self-taught, he began painting in the early 1940s. He mounted several individual exhibitions in Salvador in the 1950s, and exhibited in Rio and São Paulo in the 1960s. Nowadays, he divides his time between Rio de Janeiro and Cabo Frio.

Dorsey, Jimmy (1904-1957). Influential American band-leader and jazz instrumentalist who played the clarinet and saxophone. He began recording jazz in the 1930s, and with his brother Tommy he founded the Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra (1934-1935) which was re-formed in 1953-6.

Drummond de Andrade, Carlos (1902-1987). Widely recognised as the most influential of Brazilian poets this century. In his native Minas Gerais he was a prominent figure in the Modernist Movement and published his first collection of poems *Alguma poesia* [Some Poetry] in 1930. Lyrical, ironic and self-effacing, his poetry assumed a stronger note of social concern in the forties with the poems of *Sentimento do Mundo* [Concern for the World] (1940) and *A Rosa do Povo* [Rose of the People] (1945). Drummond was in his own words 'serious, simple and strong'. Industrious and prolific, he wrote poems and chronicles and sustained a steady output of publications throughout a long career which spanned some sixty years. Drummond de Andrade was also an accomplished translator of French and Spanish literature. In the words of Michael Hamburger: 'Drummond de Andrade's very negations somehow become poetically positive'.

Éluard, Paul (1895-1952). French poet. A member of the Dadaist and Surrealist schools, he played a prominent role in promoting avant-garde trends in poetry until the Second World War. Éluard's later works reveal a shift from pure literature to a poetry which voices political and social concerns.

Fernandel (1903-1971). French comedian and film actor who began his theatrical career in music-halls and cabaret. He started appearing in films in the 1930s. A decade later he was playing a much wider range of roles, both serious and comic, but for audiences everywhere he will always be associated with the lovable Don Camillo, a series which brought him fame and fortune.

Fernandes, Florestan (1920-). Distinguished social scientist and the author of numerous publications dealing with socio-political issues peculiar to Brazil. His early publications were based on his research into the customs and traditions of the Tupinambas: *A organização social dos Tupinambá* [The Social Organization of the Tupinambas] (1949), and *A função social da guerra na sociedade tupinambá* [The Social Function of War in Tupinamba Society] (1952).

Fernandes, Millôr (1923-). Brazilian caricaturist, humorist, playwright, journalist and translator of foreign plays. As a playwright specialising in comedy and farce, he has made his mark in the commercial theatre. A fruitful collaboration with the veteran actress Fernanda Montenegro has also contributed to his

success. Critics remain divided, however, in their reactions to his plays.

Flash Gordon. Combining science fiction with adventure, this thirteen-part serial was shown week after week in cinemas throughout the United States in the 1930s. Larry 'Buster' Crabbe starred as the comic strip hero Flash Gordon.

Fonta, Sérgio (1950-). Poet, dramatist and actor who lives and works in Rio. He has won several important prizes for his poetry. Fonta's best-known collection is *Sangue central* [Blood Centre] (1980).

Forte de São João. A disused fortress situated in the Bay of Guanabara.

Francis, Paulo (1930-). Brazilian novelist, essayist and drama critic. For some years he was New York correspondent for the Estado de São Paulo [São Paulo State]. When he was editor of the journal *Senhor* [Mister] he published some of Clarice Lispector's short stories. An anthology of Francis' own writings was published in 1978.

Freire, Natércia (1920-) Portuguese poet who lives in Lisbon. Her *Poemas* were published in 1957 and the *Poesias Escolhidas* in 1959. An edition of her complete poems is to be published shortly by the Imprensa Nacional de Moeda. For many years she directed the literary supplement of the *Diário de Notícias* [Daily News]. Freire has also written a number of books for children.

Gagarin, Yuri Alekseyevich (1934-1968). Soviet Cosmonaut. The first man to travel in space. On 12 April 1961 he made the first space flight of one orbit lasting one hundred and eight minutes. While still in his thirties, he was killed in an air crash.

Gávea, Residential district in Rio situated between Leblon and the Botanical Gardens. The Jockey Club and Hippodrome are located in this area as well as the City Museum.

Genet, Jean (1910-1986). French writer and dramatist whose career began while serving a prison sentence for theft. His first novel *Notre Dame des Fleurs* [Our Lady of the Flowers] (1944) was published in a limited edition of 350 copies. Genet also began writing plays while in prison. His work attracted the attention of other intellectuals who helped to secure his release in 1948. His novels and plays have been staged and filmed, notably *Querelle de Brest* (1947); and two outstanding plays *Les Bonnes* (1954), which won the Prix de la Pléiade, and *Le Balcon* (1956). Genet's *Journal du voleur* [Diary of a Thief] also aroused considerable interest and notoriety.

Gonçalves, Martim. Brazilian theatre director.

Gilberto, João. Bahian musician and composer and an accomplished guitarist. He was one of the best known exponents

of the *Bossa Nova* which swept Brazil in the 1950s, a musical genre which combines elements of Brazilian popular music and American jazz.

Graça, Vilma. A highly respected music teacher in Rio who taught Tom Jobim, among others.

Grajaú. Residential district in Rio de Janeiro, situated at the foot of the Pico da Tijuca.

Guimarães Rosa, João (1908-1967). Doctor, linguist, poet, writer, diplomat and Member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Universally recognized as the most important and innovative Brazilian writer of this century. His epic novels and short stories are rooted in the customs and traditions of rural communities in his native Minas Gerais. His narratives have immortalized the mythical world of the Brazilian *sertão* or hinterland. The importance of his experiments with structure and language can be gauged from his acknowledged masterpiece *Grande sertão: veredas* [Paths through the Vast Hinterland], published in 1956.

Hesse, Hermann (1877-1962). German novelist, essayist and poet. After running away from school, he became a mechanic, then a bookseller. He eventually made his way to Switzerland and in 1921 adopted Swiss nationality. Hesse's early novels offer a vivid portrayal of small-town life. His prose is remarkably fluent. He gives a sympathetic portrayal of childhood which he sees as that time in life when we can find ourselves. His masterly *Der Steppenwolf* (1927) is a severe indictment of urban values and the lack of any genuine culture in modern times. This highly controversial work is full of psychoanalytic imagery and made considerable impact on other writers of the period.

Imbassaí, Eduardo. Brazilian actor who has appeared in a number of films.

Jacobsen, Jens Peter (1847-1855). Danish novelist whose works were influenced by realism. His one great novel, *Niels Lyhne*, established his reputation in Europe.

João Henrique, Cúrcio Allemand (1935-). Brazilian primitive painter from Espírito Santo. He was self-taught and painted most of his pictures in gouache. His intimate scenes of rural life have been compared with those of the French painter Rousseau.

Jobim, Tom (Antônio Carlos Jobim). A classically trained musician whose love of popular music and American jazz led to a fruitful collaboration with the Bahian guitarist João Gilberto and the launching of *Bossa Nova*. Gilberto's wife Astrid recorded the song which was to become Jobim's first great hit, *A Garota de Ipanema* [The Girl from Ipanema].

Karabtchevsky, Isaac (1934-). Musician and conductor. A prominent figure in Brazilian musical circles for some forty years. Karabtchevsky has done much to bring classical music to wider audiences throughout Brazil. He is principal conductor of the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra based in Rio.

Kebbe. Town in Liberia, West Africa.

Khouri, Walter Hugo. Brazilian film director. His techniques are often compared with those of Ingmar Bergman.

Klein, Melanie. Austrian-born writer and psychoanalyst who worked mainly with children and ran a successful practice in Rio. For some years she lived in London. She died in 1960.

Koelbreutter, Hans (1915-). Brazilian composer and flautist of German origin. He settled in Rio in 1937 and taught in the city's Conservatory of Music. He introduced the twelve-tone system into Brazilian music and influenced a younger generation of composers. In 1943 Koelbreutter transferred to the Conservatory in São Paulo. He worked for the Goethe Institute in Munich (1963-65) and in New Delhi (1965-1969), where he founded the Delhi Conservatory, and in Poona he set up a research centre for the comparative study of Indian and Western music. He subsequently became Director of the Goethe Institute in Tokyo. Koelbreutter has mainly composed chamber music, sonatas and psalms. Now back in Brazil, he continues to compose and teach.

Körner, Christian Gottfried. A close friend of Schiller and the editor of the first complete edition of the German poet's works.

Laage, Barbara. French actress who starred in a number of films directed by Walter Hugo Khouri in Brazil.

Lagoa. A pleasant residential area surrounding the lake named after Rodrigo de Freitas and situated in the southern zone of Rio. The Avenida Epitácio Pessoa with its elegant restaurants skirts the east side of this picturesque lake, with its colourful yachts and sailing boats.

Laranjeiras. Residential area in Rio located inland between Flamengo and Botafogo. This is another district which has preserved the atmosphere of nineteenth-century Rio.

Lavoisier, Antoine Laurent (1743-1794). French chemist. Interested in mathematics and meteorology, he became commissioner of gunpowder to the French government. As a scholar, his main theories and discoveries relate to the nature of the atmosphere and the process of combustion.

Leblon. A chic residential district in Rio with a magnificent stretch of beach which tends to be less crowded than either Copacabana or Ipanema.

Leme. Fashionable district in Rio. The beach at Leme extends for a thousand metres between the Morro do Leme and the Avenida

Princesa Isabel.

Lessa, Elsie (1914-). Brazilian journalist, translator, columnist and playwright. She travelled extensively in the United States and Europe. For some years she lived in London but has now settled in Lisbon. Noted for her impeccable prose and vivid accounts of her travels, Lessa became a regular contributor to *O Cruzeiro* [The Southern Cross] and *O Globo* [The Globe]. She was once married to another much respected writer, Orígenes Lessa (1903-86).

Lessa, Ivan. The son of Elsie Lessa, he works for the BBC in London. Journalist and humorist, he wrote a weekly column for the satirical newspaper *O Pasquim* [Pasquinade].

Lewis, Ted (1892-1971). American bandleader and clarinettist.

Lima, Alceu Amoroso (1893-1983). Pseudonym: Tristão de Athayde. One of Brazil's most prolific and influential critics, he defended the Modernist Movement launched in the 1920s. His vast erudition made him one of the most able and respected intellectuals of his generation. Amoroso Lima's vast output includes essays on religion, politics, sociology, history and literature. He held the Chair of Brazilian Literature in several universities in Rio and was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1935. He also founded a prestigious publishing house, Editora Agir, and was nominated Director of the Pan American Union in Washington, a post which he held from 1951 until 1953. A convert to Roman Catholicism, he received the Order of St. Gregory from the Vatican.

Lima, Jorge de (1895-1953). Poet, novelist and critic from the State of Alagoas. A doctor by profession, he also wrote and published poetry. His early work was influenced by Parnassian and Symbolist schools but he gradually developed his own individual lyricism and became associated with the Modernist Movement in Brazil. In Lima's poetry there is a marked contrast between the hermetic poems of *Tempo e Eternidade* [Time and Eternity] (1938) with their religious preoccupations and the more lively and colloquial *Poemas Negros* (1948), which celebrate the African presence in Brazil.

Lobato, José Bento Monteiro (1882-1948). Brazilian writer best known for his books for children. A master of satire, he was an astute observer of human foibles and of everyday events in the world around him. Lobato's admirable prose also brought a new flexibility into the Portuguese language. His complete works comprise thirteen volumes of prose writings and seventeen volumes of stories for children.

Maceió. Capital of the State of Alagoas in North-eastern Brazil. This elegant city has some notable buildings enhanced by lush

tropical vegetation. In recent years important landmarks have been destroyed by planners and speculators.

Mackenzie Institute. Private University in São Paulo renowned for its high academic standards.

Magalhães, Aluísio (1927-). Brazilian painter and designer. He studied in Paris in the early 1950s before setting up a studio for experimental art in his native Recife. From 1953 onwards he began to concentrate on painting and exhibited at major exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States. His French-born wife Solange was also a painter, and Clarice Lispector published an essay on her work in 1968.

Magalhães, Ana Maria. Brazilian actress who has appeared on stage and in films.

Magalhães, Paulo and Gisela. Brazilian architects who worked in Brasília in the early stages of the new capital's urban planning. The couple became close friends of Clarice Lispector upon their return to Rio.

Manta, Dr Neves. Brazilian doctor and psychiatrist. Before he died he published several books dealing with medical matters.

Maracanã Stadium. Built in 1950 for the World Cup, this is the biggest stadium of its kind anywhere and holds nearly two hundred thousand spectators. Football matches in this futuristic setting are reputed to be something of a theatrical experience.

Marcos, Plínio (1935-). Writer, journalist, actor, playwright and television personality. He began his stage career in the Pavilhão Teatro Liberdade as a clown and comic actor. At the age of twenty-two he wrote his first play *Barrela* [The Ruse], which was banned by the censors. His best known play, *Dois perdidos numa noite suja* [Two Lost Souls on a Dirty Night], was made into a film. Marcos's plays, which are overtly political and full of social protest, have brought him popularity as well as the unwelcome attention of successive political regimes.

Martins, Justino. Brazilian journalist and Paris correspondent of the magazine *Manchete* [Headline]. He eventually became the magazine's managing editor.

Martins, Lucinda. The wife of the journalist and editor Justino Martins. Lucinda's sister Mafalda was married to the writer Érico Veríssimo. Lucinda Martins was a neighbour of Clarice Lispector and they became close friends.

Mauro, Humberto. Brazilian film-director.

Medeiros, João Rui. Editor for the Rio publishing house of José Álvaro.

Medeiros, Maurício de. Brazilian politician who for a time was Minister of Health.

Méier. District in the northern zone of Rio de Janeiro where the National Museum and Maracanã Football Stadium are located.

Melcher, José Maria da Gama. Former director of the Agency set up by the Brazilian Government for the Protection of the Indians.

Mendes, Francisco Paulo. One of Clarice Lispector's closest friends in Belém do Pará.

Mendonça, Newton (1927-1960). Brazilian composer and musician associated with the *Bossa Nova*. As successful in his time as other leading exponents of popular music such as Tom Jobim, Vinícius de Morais and Chico Buarque.

Merton, Thomas (1915-1968). French-born poet, writer and Trappist monk. His artist father was English, his mother American. He went to school in France and England and spent a year at Cambridge before going to Columbia University in New York where he graduated. A convert to Roman Catholicism, Merton entered the Monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky, in 1941, and was ordained in 1949. His works in verse and prose reveal a conflict between commitment to the solitude of monastic life and his concern for human suffering in the outside world. He was accidentally electrocuted in Bangkok during a lecture tour. His remains were flown back to America and buried at Gethsemane.

Minas Gerais. Strategically located between Rio de Janeiro and the new capital of Brasília, the hills and mountains of Minas Gerais contain some of the country's richest mineral deposits. Hence the name given to this region – 'General Mines' – when gold and diamonds were found at the end of the seventeenth century.

Monrovia. Capital of Liberia in West Africa.

Montenegro, Fernanda. (1929-). One of Brazil's most experienced and respected actresses. During her long career she has played a wide range of roles extending from Racine's *Phèdre* to Ruth in Pinter's *The Homecoming*.

Montes Claros. Suburb of Rio de Janeiro.

Monumento das Pracinhas. War Monument in Rio situated near the Museum of Modern Art and dedicated to the memory of the Brazilian soldiers who fought in Italy during the Second World War.

Morais, Tati de. Wife of the poet and composer Vinícius de Morais. She was well-known in intellectual circles and an accomplished translator of foreign literature.

Morais, Vinícius de (1913-1980). Poet, and composer of popular music. He began publishing his poems in his teens and studied English literature at Oxford. A natural flair and resourceful imagination made him the most versatile of poets: sometimes mystical and elevated; at others sensuous and colloquial. He developed his talent for writing lyrics in the late 1920s and made an important contribution to Brazilian popular music with the sheer quality of his texts. His complete works in prose and verse were published in 1974.

Nava, Pedro (1903-1984). Poet and writer from Minas Gerais. When he published his memoirs several years before he died, the book won instant acclaim. Critics were unanimous in praising the lyricism and human appeal of this valuable account of an earlier generation and its ideals and concerns. In his youth, Nava collaborated with Carlos Drummond de Andrade in editing *A Revista* [The Review], which helped to propagate the radical reforms of Modernism in Minas Gerais.

Neruda, Jan (1834-1891). Czech short-story writer, poet and journalist. From Prague, he led the May Group of writers and artists who sought to combine subjectivity with social responsibility. Neruda's *forte* was the short-story and narratives such as *Tales of the Lesser Town* (1878) gave a vivid account of petty bourgeois life in left-bank Prague. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda adopted the Czech writer's surname.

Neruda, Pablo (1904-1973). Poet, writer and diplomat. Chile's best-known poet in modern times. Much travelled and widely respected, his opulent lyricism, sensuous rhythms and passionate commitment to human justice for ordinary men and women made him one of Latin America's most popular and admired poets. His ambitious *Canto general* (1950) offers an epic account in verse of Latin America's history and evolution as seen by a poet with a Marxist outlook. His poetry has been widely translated.

Niemeyer, Oscar (1907-). Brazilian architect. He designed many important buildings in Rio before being commissioned to design most of the public buildings for the new capital Brasília. Niemeyer has also worked on architectural projects in Berlin and Paris.

Niterói (Rio de Janeiro). Founded in 1573 and until 1975 the capital of the old State of Guanabara. Niterói is situated across the strait at the mouth of the Bay of Guanabara. It is a lively commercial centre and the gateway to the Costa do Sol to the east. An historic city in its own right, Niterói has several interesting churches and buildings dating from colonial times.

Nogueira, Armando. Sports editor of the *Jornal do Brasil* [Brazilian News] who became editor for TV Globo.

Nova Friburgo. A popular summer resort situated to the northeast of Teresópolis in the State of Rio de Janeiro. This picturesque town lies in a valley surrounded by mountains. It was founded by a hundred Swiss immigrant families from the canton of Fribourg who were transferred to the region by the royal decree of 1818.

Nunes, Benedito (1929-). Brazilian writer and critic who studied philosophy in Brazil before attending the Sorbonne and Collège de France in Paris. Since 1961 he has lectured at the

University of Pará. Nunes has published numerous essays on literature and philosophy and has written some of the more illuminating studies of Clarice Lispector's fiction.

Nutels, Noel. Brazilian doctor who devoted much of his career to the welfare of the Indians.

Olinda, Recife. Founded in 1535, this is one of the largest and most beautiful complexes of colonial architecture in Brazil, with its baroque fountains, graceful squares and lush vegetation. The old town is a maze of cobbled streets, with white churches and pastel-coloured houses dotted around the hills. Olinda has become a colony for artists and musicians, and the local carnival is famous throughout Brazil.

Oliveira, Carlinhos de (José Carlos de). Brazilian journalist and columnist. He was a regular contributor to the *Jornal do Brasil* [Brazilian News] and *Manchete* [Headline].

Oliveira, Marly de (1935-). A native of Espírito Santo, she moved to Rio at an early age. Her first book of poems *Cerco da Primavera* [Circle of Spring] in 1957 won the poetry prize awarded by the National Book Institute. There is a marked philosophical note in her poetry and the themes of love and death prevail.

Paraguayan War (1865-1870). A costly and prolonged conflict between Paraguay and the armies of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. The war had disastrous consequences for Paraguay, but, if Argentina took lands from Paraguay, these were poor compensation for the cost in effort, lives and money.

Paraná. The most northerly of Brazil's southern states and one of the wealthiest in all Brazil. Paraná broke away from São Paulo in 1853 and the provincial government encouraged immigration from Europe to expand Paraná's economy and open up land for settlement. There is a distinctly European flavour in this region of Brazil.

Paratí. Situated about three hundred kilometres from Rio on the Costa Verde, Paratí is a major tourist attraction. Inhabited since 1650, this charming town has remained little changed since its heyday as a staging post for the eighteenth-century trade in gold passing from Minas Gerais to Portugal.

Peixoto, Júlio Afrânio (1876-1947). A graduate in medicine, Peixoto devoted much of his time to writing poetry and fiction. His first publications were clearly influenced by the Symbolist Movement as it developed in Europe. Peixoto moved to Rio in 1903, but novels such as *Fruta do Mato* [Fruits of the Forest] (1920) and *As razões do coração* [The Reasons of the Heart] (1925), which brought him fame, were unmistakably regional in

setting and atmosphere. Prolific and versatile, Peixoto wrote essays on a wide variety of topics and developed a special interest in Brazilian folklore. He was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1910 and his complete works were published in 1962.

Peixoto, Alzira Vargas Amaral. Daughter of the dictator Getúlio Vargas [1883-1954] and widow of Ambassador Amaral Peixoto. She met Clarice Lispector in Washington and the two women became good friends.

Pellegrino, Hélio (1924-1988). Doctor and psychoanalyst who was also widely respected as a poet, journalist and man of letters. He contributed regularly to the *Folha de São Paulo* [São Paulo Gazette] and the *Jornal do Brasil* [Brazilian News]. His collected poems are soon to be published.

Pessoa, Fernando (1888-1935). Portuguese poet born in Lisbon and educated in South Africa. In 1914 he started writing poetry under three assumed names. These heteronyms were meant to represent three completely different facets of his personality. Complex and enigmatic, Pessoa's poems combine secure lyricism with a deep questioning of the human condition. In recent years, Pessoa has come to be recognized as the greatest Portuguese poet since Camoens.

Piauí. The poorest of Brazil's North-eastern states. The capital, Teresina, is strategically placed between Fortaleza and São Luis, but it is a modern city with few attractions and the climate is oppressively hot. The state has virtually no natural resources apart from the *carnaúba* palm, a graceful tree which yields wax. The species is also a source of cooking oil, wood, soap, charcoal and nuts.

Pinto, Válter. Brazilian impresario and theatre manager who specialized in staging music-hall and cabaret.

Pitangui, Ivo. Brazilian plastic surgeon of some renown in Rio. Member of the National Academy of Medicine and the Brazilian Academy of Letters.

Pius XII (1876-1958). As Cardinal Pacelli, he was elected Pope in 1939. During his reign, Pius XII promulgated various encyclicals on behalf of the Christian ideals embodied in the statutes of *Azione Cattolica* [Catholic Action], a campaign which he hoped would help to regenerate the youth movement within the Roman Catholic Church.

Ponta Grossa, Paraná. Situated some sixty miles from Curitiba, the state capital.

Porto, Sérgio (1923-1968). Brazilian journalist and writer who became a popular broadcaster, sports commentator and television presenter. Porto was also passionately interested in popular music and wrote a *History of Jazz*. His articles often appeared under the pseudonym: Stanislaw Ponte Preta.

Queirós, Dinah Silveira de (1917-1982). Novelist, journalist, playwright and critic. Her vast output as a writer spans various genres. A writer of rare intelligence and enthusiasm, she made a notable contribution to women's literature in Brazil. Her first novel *Floradas na Serra* [The Flowering Sierra], published in 1938, was an instant success which never lost its popularity.

Queirós, José Maria Eça de (1845-1900). Portuguese writer and the most famous of Portugal's nineteenth century novelists. He studied law but soon made his mark as a journalist and writer of some distinction. Novels such as *O Crime de Padre Amaro* [Father Amaro's Crime], *O Primo Basílio* [Cousin Basil] and *O Mandarim* [The Mandarin] sealed his reputation as a writer whose impeccable prose was matched by subtle powers of observation and psychological depth.

Queiroz, Rachel de (1910-). Journalist, writer, playwright and translator, from Fortaleza, Ceará. She published her first book *O Quinze* [The Year Fifteen] while still in her teens, and the book was awarded the prestigious Graça Aranha prize. She moved to Rio in 1930 but never lost contact with her native Ceará where she owned a country estate. Intensely active in literary and political circles, Queiroz was imprisoned in 1937 after being denounced as a Trotskyist. Amongst her many publications *As Três Marias* [The Three Marys] (1939) is worthy of note. This outstanding novel movingly probes the tragic sense of life and shows a deep understanding of female psychology. The book's female characters raise moral and social questions rather than purely political issues, despite the author's lifelong commitment to left-wing politics.

Quintana, Mário (1906-). A native of Rio Grande do Sul where he has lived and worked all his life, Quintana is admired throughout Brazil as a distinguished poet, journalist and translator of European literature, notably the works of Proust. A master of the poetic aphorism and the ups and downs of everyday existence, Quintana exudes humour and compassion. In 1966 he was awarded the much coveted Fernando Chinaglia prize. In trying to define the essence of his own verse, Quintana praised the poem 'without any anguish other than the mysterious condition of the poem itself'.

Rabassa, Gregory (1922-). University lecturer and a well-known translator into English from the Spanish and Portuguese languages.

Raiz de Serra. Tourist resort located on the picturesque old route to Petrópolis. The town is graced by the former presidential palace which has now been converted into a museum.

Rebelo, Marques (1907-1973) Pseudonym of Edy Dias da Cruz.

Active in literary circles and the author of fiction dealing with urban mores and attitudes. His narratives capture the unmistakable atmosphere and colloquialisms of Rio de Janeiro. A master of sharp dialogue and witty repartee, Rebelo combines humour with nostalgia for the past. A gifted translator, he also became general editor of an important series of major literary works. His essays and reviews appeared in numerous journals and magazines, and for some years he was a regular columnist for *Última Hora* [Late Final].

Recife. The capital of the State of Pernambuco and the largest city in North-eastern Brazil. Despite recent expansion and some unsightly modern buildings, the city has preserved much of its fine colonial architecture and some impressive churches.

Renan, Joseph Ernest (1823-1892). French philosopher, philologist and historian. His *Études d'histoire religieuse* (1857) and *Essais de morale et de critique* (1859) provoked fierce debate and controversy. His unorthodox religious views also brought him into conflict with other philosophers and theologians.

Resende, Otto Lara (1922-). Brazilian writer, poet, critic and journalist. As a poet he was associated with the 1945 Generation. He published his first collection of short stories *O Lado Humano* [The Human Aspect] in 1952 and subsequent publications were awarded important literary prizes. Resende was one of Clarice Lispector's closest friends during the years she lived in Rio. His prose is notable for its immediacy and admirable clarity. Like Clarice Lispector herself, he has a special rapport with the world of children and adolescents. In many of his short stories there is also a marked note of social commitment and genuine concern about moral issues.

Ritner, Maurício. Brazilian film producer.

Rodrigues, Augusto (1913-). Pernambucan artist, painter and caricaturist. Rodrigues has drawn cartoons for leading newspapers in Recife and São Paulo. He has also devoted much of his life to the education of children through the medium of art. He founded his own school in Rio in 1948 in order to draw closer links between art and education and the project extended to other Brazilian cities as well as to Paraguay and Argentina. Under his guidance, exhibitions of children's drawings and paintings were exhibited nationally and in all the major European capitals.

Rodrigues, Nelson (1912-1980). Cousin of the artist Augusto Rodrigues and one of Brazil's most successful dramatists. He moved to Rio in 1916 and devoted himself to journalism and writing for the theatre. His first play *Uma mulher sem pecado* [A Woman without Sin] was staged in 1939 but the two plays which brought him fame were *Vestido de noiva* [The Bridal Dress] (1943) and *Beijo no asfalto* [Kiss by the Roadside] (1960). Nelson Rodrigues

has also written novels and short stories. His experiences as a crime reporter have influenced his plots where the prevailing note is often that of tragic forces and ironic destiny.

Rondon, Cândido Mariano da Silva (1865-1958). Born in Mato Grosso, Rondon joined the army and moved up through the ranks to become Field Marshal by a special decree in recognition of his pioneering activities in the Brazilian hinterland. An engineer by training, Rondon pursued his interest in geography, ethnography and geology and carried out various explorations in the North-eastern territories. He gave assistance to the Indian tribes there and helped to create the National Council for the Protection of the Indians. His motto was: 'To die if necessary, to kill, never.'

Sá, Irene Tavares de. Brazilian novelist and essayist. Sister of the late Hernane Tavares de Sá, doctor, writer, columnist and academic, who taught in the United States and acted as consultant for the Walt Disney Studios in Hollywood.

Santa Teresa. A hillside residential area with splendid views of the city of Rio and the Bay of Guanabara. Cobbled streets, colonial mansions and tropical flora and fauna make this one of the most desirable locations in Rio.

Santos, Nélson Pereira dos. Brazilian film producer who died some years ago.

Sass Town. Minor port in southeastern Liberia.

Savelli, Angelo (1911-). Italian abstract painter influenced by the Expressionist Movement, he was born in Reggio Calabria but studied and worked in Rome. Savelli taught at the Liceo Artistico in the Italian capital before moving to New York in 1954. He has taught and exhibited throughout the United States.

Schlesinger, Arthur (1888-1965). American historian whose emphasis on social and urban developments introduced new approaches to the study of American history. Schlesinger taught at the Universities of Iowa and Harvard. His major publication on urban growth *The Rise of the City* (1933) became a standard work of reference.

Schmidt, Augusto, Frederico (1906-1965). Poet, writer and translator. Born in Rio de Janeiro, he received his early education in Switzerland. Schmidt was one of the more introspective poets of the Modernist Movement and he had a lifelong passion for the language and literature of France. He combined his literary pursuits with a flair for business and set up his own publishing house among other enterprises. His complete works were published in 1956. Much of his verse is neo-romantic in tone and dwells on the universal themes of love, solitude, death and the transience of all earthly things. When Kubitschek came to power, Schmidt became a prominent and influential figure in govern-

ment circles and he represented Brazil at a number of important international conferences.

Scliar, Carlos (1920-). Born in Rio Grande do Sul. Major Brazilian painter, designer and engraver. He started exhibiting his work in the mid-1930s. In 1938 he helped to found the Association of Plastic Arts. Scliar fought in Italy with the Allies during the Second World War and painted scenes on the battlefield. From 1947 to 1950 he lived in Paris. Back in Brazil, he began to develop his skills as an engraver under the influence of German Expressionism. In the mid-1950s he decided to go back to painting and designing. He was invited to exhibit abroad and his pictures hang in permanent collections in Brazil, New York and Boston.

Segall, Lasar (1891-1957). Lithuanian-born painter, designer, engraver and sculptor. He studied in Berlin and Dresden and participated in the aims and objectives of the German Expressionist Movement. In 1912 he visited Brazil and mounted exhibitions of his own work in São Paulo and Campinas. These were the first exhibitions of modern art to be shown in Brazil. In 1918 he helped to found the Dresdner Sezession Gruppe. In 1923 he returned to Brazil and settled in São Paulo. Major exhibitions followed both in Brazil and Europe. Segall took up sculpture in bronze, wood and stone after a visit to Paris in 1929. Back in Rio, he helped to launch the Sociedade Pro-Arte Moderna in 1932. A retrospective exhibition of his work was mounted at the Venice Biennale in 1958.

Sued, Ibrahim. Brazilian journalist and columnist who wrote for the *O Globo* [The Globe]. He has published two books of memoirs: *Vinte anos de caviar* [Twenty Years of Caviar] and *Trinta anos de reportagem* [Thirty Years as a Reporter].

Tallah. Town in Liberia.

Tijuca National Park. This elevated area of Rio covers approximately one hundred and twenty square kilometres. From Tijica there are some spectacular views of the city. Sections of the park are used for *candomblé* and *umbanda* ritual ceremonies. The northern part of the area is known as the Floresta de Tijuca.

Trevisan, Armindo (1933-). Distinguished poet who lives and works in his native Rio Grande do Sul. He was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1957 but he subsequently returned to secular life and married. After studying in Paris and Lisbon, Trevisan took his doctorate at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, with a thesis on Bergson. Trevisan has been steadily publishing his books of verse since the late 1950s. He also teaches the History of Art and Aesthetics at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

Trevisan, Dalton (1925-). One of Brazil's most popular exponents of the short story. He headed the literary group which launched the influential magazine *Joaquim* in the 1940s, during the second phase of Modernism. Some twenty-one issues appeared before circulation halted in 1948. Set in urban Curitiba, Trevisan's salacious narratives have won a number of important awards and influenced many younger writers. A truly prolific writer, he is something of a pioneer with his *mini-contos* which foreshadow minimalist techniques. Gregory Rabassa translated a selection of Trevisan's stories into English: *The Vampire of Curitiba and other Stories* published by Knopf, New York in 1972.

Urca. A middle-class residential district in Rio named after the construction company which developed the area. Sited on a promontory, there are small beaches on either side. The cable-car system (installed in 1912) is located on the Praia Vermelha. It stops first on the Morro da Urca, before ascending to the Sugar Loaf Mountain itself.

Valente, Mozart Gurgel. Clarice Lispector's brother-in-law, who died while serving as Brazilian Ambassador in Washington. His widow, Eliane, who was born in France, now resides in Rio.

Veríssimo, Érico (1905-1975). One of the most popular writers to have emerged from Rio Grande do Sul in this century. Versatile and productive, Veríssimo developed his precocious interest in music, art and literature. He had various jobs before moving to Porto Alegre, the state capital. There he joined the editorial staff of *O Globo* [The Globe]. He also made his name as a translator of literary texts. His first novel, *Clarissa*, was published in 1930. Even greater success came with *O Tempo e o Vento* [Time and the Wind] (1949-51) which retraces the history of his native Rio Grande do Sul. Veríssimo taught Brazilian Literature in a number of American universities, and received many honours at home and abroad. His writings have been widely translated. He also published *A Brief History of Brazilian Literature* in English. His rare ability to capture the psychology of a country and its people through their customs and traditions made him an exceptionally gifted travel writer.

Vila Isabel. District in the northern zone of Rio de Janeiro. Famous throughout Brazil as the place where the musician Noel Rosa, the so-called King of Samba, was born

Vila-Lobos, Heitor (1887-1959). Brazil's most famous composer. Born in Rio de Janeiro, he toured as a pianist and collected Brazilian folk-music. He took up composition and performed a concert of his own works in 1945. Villa-Lobos spent some time studying

in Paris. Back in Brazil, he participated in the Week of Modern Art which was held in São Paulo in February 1922. He composed no fewer than five operas, twelve symphonies, and some eighteen ballets. His *Bachianas Brasileiras* and *Choros* are performed world-wide.

Vilaseca, Jaime and Gilda. Intimate friends of Clarice Lispector.

Vila Velha. The State Park of Vila Velha is situated some ninety-seven kilometres from Curitiba (Paraná). The unique feature of this site are the rock pillars carved by time and nature from glacial sandstone deposits. From a distance they look like monumental abstract sculptures.

Vilas Boas, Orlando and Claudio. Brothers born into a wealthy family, they have devoted all their energies since 1943 to the plight of the Indians in Central Brazil who have been threatened with extinction. Abandoning the comforts of São Paulo, they made a scientific study of the problems of the Indians of the Alto-Xingu. Their diaries, written over some twenty-five years, constitute a valuable record of the flora and fauna, geography and climate of the region.

Vitória. Capital of Espírito Santo. One of the oldest cities in Brazil but few traces of its past remain. The location is impressive: a combination of sea, steep hills, granite outcrops and mountains on the horizon, but the city itself has been ruined by indiscriminate urban developments.

Wainer, Samuel. Highly respected Brazilian journalist and founder of the weekly magazine *Diretrizes* [Directives] in the 1930s. Wainer also founded *Última Hora* [Late Final], an evening newspaper which set new and up-dated standards for the Brazilian press. His wife Bluma, who died in the 1950s, was noted in literary circles for her beauty and intelligence. She was also an intimate friend of Lispector.

Xavier, Nélson. Popular Brazilian actor who makes frequent appearances on stage and television.

Xingu National Park. Set up by the Brazilian government in 1961 at the head-waters of the Xingu River, to protect the Indian tribes in the region, the park covers more than thirty thousand square miles. A new threat to the survival of these tribes has emerged with proposals for a trans-continental highway.